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An Investigation into the Formation and Recruitment Processes of Aboriginal Gangs in Western Canada

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An Investigation into the Formation and Recruitment Processes of Aboriginal Gangs in Western Canada

"When You Have Nothing to Live For, You Have Nothing to Die For"

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INTRODUCTION

"When You Have Nothing to Live For, You Have Nothing to Die For"

The direct quote above, taken from an Aboriginal ex-gang member, succinctly and powerfully alludes to the anomalistic character of Aboriginal gangs. American gang research and the relatively small body of Canadian research on the topic points to the functional role of gangs: they exist because they serve a purpose. Gangs are attractive to recruits because they promise material benefits; in many instances joining a gang is a means to increase an individual's income significantly. A young person can make more in a ten-minute "package drop off" than he or she could make in a week working at a local fast food chain. With this function foremost in the minds of many young recruits, joining a gang appears to be a rational choice. Our research reveals that the promise of material gain is one of several factors that contribute to Aboriginal gang membership. Gangs offer other additional benefits to Aboriginal youth, benefits that should be filled by various other social institutions – but aren't. This report provides a brief literature review of current gang research, including the incorporation of information from documents produced by agencies that work with gang-involved youth. The contribution of this report is an integration of the information found in the documents with analysis of in-depth interviews conducted with ex-gang members (incarcerated and non-incarcerated), law enforcement officials, correctional workers, and elders who work within the correctional system. This is the first study of its kind: aside from two exploratory studies produced through government agencies, a body of literature on Aboriginal street and prison gangs in Canada is virtually nonexistent.

The lack of research on the topic in and of itself attests to the marginalization of Aboriginal issues in our country. Our findings show that in many cases Aboriginal youth become involved with gangs because they have nothing to live for. Lives disrupted by dysfunctional families, lack of educational and work opportunities, and negative peer associations are compounded by systemic discrimination and labeling. The end result is not only "nothing to live for" but "nothing to die for" as well. In the context of such despair, Aboriginal gangs attempt to the fill the gap for disenfranchised and marginalized young people. This report explores the causal factors for Aboriginal gangs, including the risk factors that make some Aboriginal youth particularly vulnerable to the seductions of gang life, and describes three programs that aim to help in the prevention and intervention of Aboriginal gang activities at both the street and institutional levels.

For Aboriginal families specifically in the Prairie Provinces, the gang issue is a growing phenomenon; youth are being recruited into this lifestyle both on the street and in prisons, leaving school and family behind to take on the gangster identity. The street gang-prison gang link is one that is pronounced for Aboriginal gangs: Aboriginal overrepresentation in the prison system is linked to the increase in numbers and size of Aboriginal gangs in Canada. The migration to gang lifestyles by young men and women has serious consequences in the form of victimization, criminal behaviour, criminal records, jail time, injury and death to name a few, for individuals, families and entire communities.

Results from our study confirm the anomalous status of Aboriginal gangs in the Canadian gang landscape. Aboriginal gangs appear to have different causes and characteristics than other gangs. Their recruitment processes are considerably more violent than other gangs. Aboriginal

gangs are more apt to follow the "standard" for gangs in the United States, where tattoos, hand symbols, and strict chains of command define gang membership and function. In this sense Aboriginal gangs are unlike other gangs in our country.

Based on our findings, we suggest that the various causal factors, including a lack of bonding to conventional society, which presents in the form of family-related issues, lack of educational and employment opportunities, and problematic peer associations, should inform the policy and programming initiatives used in dealing with these groups. These issues are exacerbated by a system that discriminates against Aboriginal youth in many ways and at many levels. Such problems are then compounded and perpetuated by labeling of Aboriginal youth by institutional authorities, media, and society generally.

There are two unique opportunities when programming in this area can be effective: first, preventative programs, which focus on youth-at-risk, reading with issues that are the pre-cursors to gang involvement, focusing on the structural conditions that make gangs an attractive option and sometimes the only option for marginalized youth. Second, intervention programming for individuals already committed to a criminal/gang lifestyle many of whom are already convicted of an offence and already serving time. The three programs discussed in the report deal with the same causal factors, only at different stages in the process. Gang Prevention and Intervention is run by two Aboriginal ex-gang members who offer intervention services for gang-involved individuals who want to leave the lifestyle (intervention), presentations on the realities of gang life to students (prevention), and workshops to professionals working in the field. A second initiative, the Community Solution to Gang Violence is an integrated approach to gang prevention which involves over forty community agencies working to build support and

programming for at risk youth, families, and educational institutions, including the education of the community on the topic. The underpinning philosophy of the project is that is takes a community to raise a child. The increase in gang problems is an indication that our communities need to be strengthened. Finally, Healing Through Dynamic Intervention is a philosophical approach and program offered to long term offenders with the goal of addressing causal factors, in group therapy and individual therapy sessions, that contribute to gang and criminal lifestyles. These three programs have as their objectives the reduction of marginalization, discrimination and labeling that contribute to gang involvement. In short, such programs show youth at risk and incarcerated offenders that they do in fact have something to live for.

An Investigation into the Formation and Recruitment Processes of Aboriginal Gangs in Western Canada

"When You Have Nothing to Live For, You Have Nothing to Die For"[1]:

Aboriginal gangs in Canada are unique; they are an anomaly in terms of structure, recruitment processes and existing processes. They arise from a specific set of circumstances, a particular configuration of social, institutional, economic and political contexts, and they result in consequences that affect all Canadians. Currently, there are increasing numbers of youth and young adults who are being actively recruited into Aboriginal gangs, and they appear to fulfill a need for Aboriginal individuals that is not being met by other Canadian social institutions. The street gang-prison gang link is one that is most pronounced for Aboriginal gangs; therefore, Aboriginal overrepresentation in the prison system is connected to the increase in numbers and size of Aboriginal gangs in Canada (Mercredi, 2000).

For all of these reasons, Aboriginal gangs warrant our attention not only to understand and explain their criminal activities, but more importantly, to understand the system wide precursors to Aboriginal gang involvement, build a profile of youth at risk of being recruited, and develop prevention and intervention strategies that can be implemented in both prisons and community settings. The goal of this report is to describe the complex process of Aboriginal gang formation and recruitment on the street and in Canadian prisons. Our guiding research objectives are as follows:

- To explore the definition(s) of gangs in Canada, and how Aboriginal gangs fit into this larger context;
- To describe Aboriginal gangs in the Edmonton area;
- To understand how and why Aboriginal youth are recruited into gangs;
- To illuminate similarities, differences and links between Aboriginal street gangs and prison gangs; and

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[1] Quote taken from interview with ex-member of an Aboriginal gang.

- To describe prevention and intervention strategies as they relate to Aboriginal street gang and prison gang recruitment.

Project Overview

The research findings presented in this report combine data collected in two research projects. The first was a study conducted by Native Counselling Services of Alberta's (NCSA) BearPaw Research regarding Aboriginal gangs in Canadian prisons. The purpose of the study was to create a gang management handbook for the Correctional Service of Canada. This included describing the Aboriginal gangs in prisons, their recruitment strategies, why men join prison gangs, as well as developing strategies to manage gangs safely and effectively.

The second project is part of an ongoing community-based initiative entitled the "Community Solution to Gang Violence" (CSGV), aimed at reducing gang activities in the city of Edmonton, through prevention and intervention into youth gang-related activities and processes. The project involves the participation of approximately 100 individuals representing over 40 community group and organizations, including all three levels of government, the Edmonton Police Service, and is administered through NCSA.

As part of the project, an evaluation team has as their mandate the role of documenting youth gang related activities in the area to establish some understanding of the extent and nature of the problem. The evaluation of CSGV reflects the holistic philosophy of the initiative. The evaluation strategy will measure to ascertain whether there has been a change the salient aspects of gang activities (i.e. a reduction in the number of gang-related murders) as a result of the CSGV strategy. Measuring and evaluating community mobilization will also be undertaken, which necessitates tapping into broader systemic indicators.

The most challenging aspect of the evaluation process, this component of the evaluation requires establishing *baseline indicators* of "gang activities" in the area and then "re-measuring" them as the initiative progresses. Because of the holistic philosophy underpinning CSGV, baseline indicators include, in addition to more overt measures of gang activity such as numbers of violent crimes, drug related offences, and deaths due to gang violence, broader measures of "risk" in the city.

To date, data collection in each of the areas discussed in the following section has begun. The present paper draws on some of the data already collected as part of this ongoing project and evaluation.

Method and Sample

Employing a multi-method approach is integral to grasping the nature of gang activities and their impact on the community. This report will draw on an extensive review of previous studies (both in the United States and Canada), which have employed both quantitative and qualitative methods. In addition, qualitative and semi-structured interviews with police officers, correctional officers and Aboriginal ex-gang members provided rich data for analysis.

Literature Review. An extensive literature review on gangs in Canada and the United States has been conducted and informs this report. While some recent studies on gangs in Canada have been conducted, there is much left to explore. The state of knowledge on Canadian gangs is relatively limited compared to our American counterparts. In our review of over fifty articles on the topic of street and/or prison gangs, approximately 20 percent of the studies are based on Canadian data. Both countries however lack information on Aboriginal gangs[2]. Of the academic articles surveyed, one American article focused on "Native American" youths and gangs (Joseph and Taylor, 2003).

Law Enforcement Interviews: An internal intelligence report provided to the researchers by the Edmonton Police Service Gang Unit (2005) and a face-to-face, open ended interview with a member of the Unit have provided information on the numbers of active gangs, active gang members, gang structures and hierarchies, membership (age, race, gender), criminal activities, recruitment, and changes in the nature of gangs over time. In addition, an Edmonton Police Service School Liaison Officer was interviewed, regarding his perspective on youth who are at-risk of being recruited and recruitment practices that occur in schools.

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[2] With the exception of several excellent studies on Aboriginal offenders and gangs conducted through the Correctional Service of Canada.

Interviews with Ex-Gang Members: Researchers conducted open ended, face-to-face interviews with three ex-gang members living in the community and six incarcerated ex-gang members. This sample represents individuals who were affiliated with a number of different gangs. The focus of the interviews was to collect data about the risk factors of youth who are gang-involved and/or who are at risk of gang involvement, including information on recruitment and desistance from gang-related activities. Participants were asked to recall their personal experiences of getting into a gang, what gang life was for them and the process of how they got out of their gang. Extensive and detailed field notes were taken during most interviews; others were taped and transcribed (with identifiers removed). Interviews were 30-40 minutes in length.

Correctional Service Employee Interviews: A total of twenty-five individuals from a number of federal correctional facilities in the Prairies Region of the Correctional Service of Canada were interviewed face to face, by telephone, or through a self-administered questionnaire. Interviewees include people who work in the following capacities: IPSO Security Intelligence Officers, Placement Officers, Correctional Officers, Native Liaison Worker, Aboriginal Centre Coordinator, Gang Intelligence Officer, Correctional Programs Officer, Executive Assistant to Warden and Parole Officers. In addition, four Elders were interviewed as they had a unique and important perspective on Aboriginal gang members in prisons.

Experience ranged from one year working in the system to thirty years of experience. Many of the respondents indicated daily contact with gang members in the institutions. Some who worked in the Institutions' Cultural Centres or facilitating Aboriginal-specific programs indicated they were involved in developing institutional policies and programs, which prohibited gang activities in their centres, ranges, and/or programs. Two of the institutions have ranges that deal specifically with the gang issues. In one case the Intensive Monitoring Range separates gang members from general population inmates, in another a range is set aside for inmates trying to leave gangs.

An interviewer who has personal experience working in the federal system was contracted by NCSA to conduct the interviews. Following an established interview schedule, this researcher conducted interviews face to face or by telephone. He tape recorded interviews where respondents granted permission to do so. In addition to this, he recorded the answers on a hard

copy of the questionnaire. In instances where permission was not granted, he recorded the individual's answers on a hard copy of the questionnaire. Interviews lasted an average of 30 – 40 minutes. In some cases questionnaires were completed by respondents and returned to the interviewer.

After the interviews were completed, the questionnaires and tapes were given to another researcher who coded the hard copies, transcribed the taped interviews, and compared her transcriptions with those answers recorded by the interviewer. In this way, inter-coder reliability was established and confirmed.

Discussion Rationale

While the phenomenon of gangs is not new to Canada, the increasing concern expressed by communities, governments, law enforcement agencies, and criminal justice system personnel is relatively new. Now more than ever politicians, community members, educators, police officers, social workers, probation/parole officers and psychologists are speaking about the issue and searching for solutions.

There appears to be good reason for this growing apprehension. The Correctional Service of Canada and prison officials nationwide report increasing gang activity behind bars. Media reports fuel the concern by sensationalizing the criminal activities of these groups (Fasilio and Leckie, 1993) and the popularization of "gangsta" imagery by movies, television and music, hold Canadians both fascinated and terrified of gang activities. Perhaps most importantly, gangs warrant our attention because people are being victimized and youth are being lost to organized, and even not so organized, groups that lead them into lives of crime and violence.

For Aboriginal families specifically in the Prairie Provinces, the gang issue is a growing phenomenon. Youth are being recruited into this lifestyle both on the street and in prisons, leaving school and family behind to take on the gangster identity. This criminal and violent lifestyle increases risk of victimization, criminal records and prison time, serious injury, and death. Further, when young Aboriginal men choose to take on a persona generated by African American gangs, they lose their connection to their people and their identity as a Cree, Blackfoot, Lakota, Dene, or Métis etc. This migration to gang lifestyles by young men and

women, therefore, can have serious consequences for the individual, family and entire community. In the documentary "Gang Aftermath" Detective Doug Reti, RCMP states:

> "I have never witnessed gang activity so pronounced as I have seen it here, in the community I am in (Hobbema). At such a young age also. We are seeing kids young as nine and ten as runners, as young as 13 doing drive by shooting and carrying weapons and so forth"

As mentioned earlier, there is a dearth of Canadian research on the topic of gangs. Most of the information informing our approach to gangs is based either on media accounts of gang activities, or on information from the United States. Yet, differences between the countries in terms of history, ethnic and cultural composition, government policies, health and educational apparatus, gun control, drug legislation and policing testify to the inadequacy in relying solely on this source of information. There is a growing body of research on the topic of gangs. One noteworthy example by Mellor, MacRae, Pauls & Hornick provides a catalogue listing and description of the 77 programs that exist across the country with the primary purpose of either preventing or intervening in gang activities (2005). Information on Aboriginal gangs in Canada is even more sparse with the bulk being generated by police forces and the Correctional Services of Canada.

Some National Numbers

- The Canadian Police Survey on Youth Gangs (2002) estimated the number of youth gangs in Canada at 434 with an estimated membership of 7,071.
- Approximately 59% of the national population is served by law enforcement agencies reporting active youth gangs (Mellor et al, 2005: 2).
- Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and British Columbia have the highest percentage of jurisdictions reporting active youth gangs.
- No youth gang activity was reported in the northern territories or the Maritimes (with the exception of Nova Scotia).
- On a per capita basis, Saskatchewan reported the highest concentration of youth gang members: 1.34 per 1,000 population or approximately 1,315 (CPS, 2002: 13-14).

- There are at least 12 known adult and youth gangs operating in Saskatchewan. Approximately 70% of the gang members in Saskatoon are 18 years or older and in Regina the average age is 24 (CISS, 2005: 2).
- Based on the criminal history of a sample of known gang members (n=56) in Saskatchewan, a large percentage (87.5%) had previous youth court convictions, multiple property-related offences, and the severity of their offences escalated with age (CISS, 2005: 3).
- The vast majority of youth gang members are male (94%) and are between the ages of 16 and 18 (39%). Almost half (48%) are under the age of 18 (Mellor et all, 2005: 2).
- The largest proportion of youth gang members in Canada are African/Canadian/Black (25%), followed by Aboriginal (22%) and Caucasian/White (18%) (Mellor et al, 2005: 2).
- Across the country, 40% of respondents believe that the return of adult or youth gang-involved inmates from prison has affected youth gangs very much (Mellor et al, 2005: 2).
- In Alberta, Aboriginal youth are 4.5 times more likely than non-Aboriginal youth to be young offenders (Edmonton Urban Aboriginal Accord Initiative, 2005: 45).
- While Aboriginal youth make up 7% of the total youth population in Alberta, in 2000-2001, 31% of youth placed in temporary custody were Aboriginal. Of the young people admitted to open custody, 33% were Aboriginal (Edmonton Urban Aboriginal Accord Initiative, 2005: 45).
- Aboriginal-based gang recruitment focuses on Aboriginal youth, creating the next generation of street gang members. These street gangs possess lower level criminal capabilities while demonstrating a high propensity for violence (Edmonton Urban Aboriginal Accord Initiative, 2005: 45).

What is a Gang?

A broad spectrum of people uses the term 'gang' to describe various collectivities. Police officers, politicians, school authorities, residents of crime ridden-neighbourhoods, correctional officers, prison administrators all possess different notions of what constitutes a gang and gang activities based on their experience and expertise. For this reason, defining a 'gang' is a difficult task. A broad, inclusive definition of a 'gang' might read as follows:

> A gang sometimes is defined as a group, large or small, that has a name, common symbols, a territory, a meeting place or pattern and an organization toward criminality. Gang members are products of the community. They range in age, and members may be male or female. Gangs organize themselves in various ways -- sometimes under the guise of social or religious groups, ostensibly geared toward cultural improvement, yet often applying legitimate or illegal tactics – such as violence, extortion and fear – to enhance gang power, prestige, and profits (Toller and Tsagaris, 1996: 110).

The use of such an inclusive definition, while certainly accounting for the variety of groups that exist, is futile for policy makers, community members and justice system personnel who want to understand and effectively deal with the phenomenon. Addressing gang problems in practical terms requires a less inclusive, more specific definition of the group(s) to be targeted.

As Mathews (2005) points out, one view is that "gang" is a judgmental and overly negative term applied non-discriminately by adults to groups of adolescents ranging from "friends hanging out" who occasionally get into trouble, to more serious organized criminal gangs (204). In loosely referring to groupings of youth as "gangs" onlookers tend to neglect the fact that associating with friends is an important part of adolescent development – that important stage where young people learn to exert their independence from family by forming healthy relationships with peers. The danger of inappropriate labeling of gang members by parents, law enforcement agents, the court, the prisons, the media, or citizens generally is a theme we return to later in this discussion.

Another issue concerns the fact that not all "gangs" are the violent, fear inducing groups of the type sensationalized in the media. In this sense the term "gang" is misleading and fear provoking. Additionally, the age range of youth gang members is wide, precluding the involvement of 12 to 17 years olds only (the legal definition of a young offender) (Mathews 2005: 204); members of these gangs may be younger than twelve and certainly much older than 17. In this context, then, the term "youth" can be misleading. Furthermore, Gordon provides evidence of small groups of offenders being referred to as "gangs" by authorities and the media, when in fact the members in question did not see themselves that way (2000:47).

In fact, Canadian researchers have developed several typologies of gangs to assist in the definition, recognition, and classification of groups. The rationale behind typology creation is

that prevention and intervention is facilitated by the identification of certain group characteristics. Mellor et al (2005) list five types of youth groups/gangs, including:

Type (A) Group of Friends;

Type (B) Spontaneous Criminal Activity Group/Gang;

Type (C) Purposive Group/Gang;

Type (D) Youth Street Gang; and

Type (E) Structured Criminal Organization.

Each group has specific defining characteristics including the nature of association, age, gender, ethnic composition, and main type of activity.

Gordon, in his research on known gang members in the Greater Vancouver area, identifies groups that seem to attract the label "gang":

- Youth groups;
- Criminal groups;
- "Wanna-be" groups;
- Street gangs; and
- Criminal business organizations (2000: 48).

His latest work focuses on the latter three groups. Criminal business organizations exhibit a formal structure and a high degree of sophistication, are comprised primarily of adults, maintain a low profile and engage in criminal activity primarily for economic reasons. Street gangs, groups of young people, mainly young adults, are semi-structured. The main purpose of street gangs is planned and profitable criminal behaviour or organized violence against rival groups. These groups have identifiable "markings", including a name, clothing, colours, and a desire to be seen by others as gang members. Finally, "wanna-be" groups are loosely structured and engage in spontaneous social activity, as well as impulsive, exciting criminal activity including collective violence against other groups of young people. These groups are not as structured, organized or permanent as the street gangs and criminal business organizations (2000: 48).

While these distinctions certainly aid in our understanding of the complexities and the differences in the way gangs are organized, it appears that when we leave the typology and look to reality, the distinctions become blurred (Correctional Services Alberta, 2003; Mathews, 2005; Mathews, 1993). In Gordon's typology the primary distinction between these groups seems to be in their degree of organization and relative sophistication. Such distinctions are useful in conceptualizing and informing strategies within the criminal justice system and responding to the criminal activities of members. However, for practitioners the distinctions perhaps bear a different meaning. While "wanna-bes" may not have the organizational structure to be a profitable or sustained criminal organization their destructive impact on children (potential members or those already involved) is significant. In fact the "wanna-bes" may be the most significant group to focus on in terms of prevention at the community level. As we see shortly, one Edmonton street gang in particular, referred to as the Northside Boys, initially fit into Gordon's "wanna-be" category but with time morphed into a street gang with a relatively significant presence in the city. As the Edmonton experience illustrates, "wanna-bes" can and do become involved in street gangs and at the street level with organized crime groups. This has policy implications for prevention and intervention discussed later in this paper.

So where does this leave us with a definition of gangs? Association with friends is a healthy part of growing up, but at what point does the association become unhealthy? When does a group of young people "just hanging out" and "having some fun" cross the line into more organized criminal activities? Defining "gang" activity becomes more complicated when we consider the range in communities and jurisdictions in Canada, and the concomitant range in perception among individuals in what constitutes a "gang", youth or otherwise.

The Federal Government in 2002 passed Bill C-24, an amendment to the *Criminal Code*, which provides a legal definition of an organized crime group. A criminal organization means:

- A group, however organized, that is composed of three or more persons;
- That has as one of its main purposes or main activities the facilitation or commission of one or more serious offences; and
- That, if committed, would likely result in the direct or indirect receipt of a material benefit, including a financial benefit, by the group or by any one of the persons who constitute the group (EPS Gang Unit Handbook).

This definition, from a legal point of view is important because of its impact on police behaviour and the way the criminal justice system defines, and therefore deals with accused members of criminal organizations. The definition is problematic, however, from a service provider or research perspective, as it does not illuminate the more complex aspects of gang structure, activity and membership. Further, different regions in our country have gang issues that are particular to the specific area or region, based on factors such as the socioeconomic status of the areas, and the ethnic and age composition of members. Gang problems in Ontario are different from those in Saskatchewan or Vancouver. While there are similarities in causes and processes of gang formation, the specific nature the group takes will depend in part on the region of the country in which it is located (Mellor et al, 2005: 1).

For example, the Calgary Police Service sees the term "gang" as slang and tends not to use it. The Toronto police use the term to primarily refer to crime-focused groups and organized street gangs (Mathews, 2005: 205). The Montreal police define a street gang as "a group of individuals, usually adolescents and /or young adults who use the power of the group intimidation in order to carry out, on a more or less regular basis, violent criminal acts". They then go on to outline the following six criteria of a street gang:

1. Organized structure
2. Identifiable leadership
3. A defined territory
4. Regular association of several juvenile delinquents
5. A specific goal
6. Involvement in illegal activities (Symons, 1999: 126).

Gangs are defined in the Edmonton Police Service Policy as "a group of persons consorting together to engage in unlawful activity" (EPS Gang Unit report, 2005). This definition is widely encompassing and could, for example, include a group of individuals who commit an armed robbery once. As Mathews states, "there is no single theory or definition that can account for the pluralistic or heterogeneous gang/group phenomenon in contemporary Canadian society" (1999: 4). Gangs in Canada therefore, must be defined in the local context.

The definition used in this discussion is informed by Mathews' research: "the terms 'gang' and 'gang activity' are used in a general sense to refer to a variety of adolescent peer associations whose common feature is impulsive or intentional law-breaking. It might be helpful to view the term 'gang' as being synonymous with 'gang/group' or 'antisocial peer group' (2005: 205). Although, in keeping with specificity to local context and purpose, our definition also includes young adults, and gangs behind bars.

Aboriginal Gangs In Canada: An Overview

How can we define and understand Aboriginal gangs in the context of the larger issue of gang activity in Canada? Despite the tendency for Aboriginal gangs to be homogeneous[3] there is some variety in the types of groups that Aboriginal youth form. Gordon's (1995) typology reports the existence of five types of youth groups. We, following his recent work (2000), focus on three such groups as they relate to Aboriginal youth.

Data collected from police, correctional and ex-gang informants for both the CSC handbook and the CSGV evaluation, indicates that most Aboriginal groups fall into the street gang category. In Gordon's Street gang typology, members tend to be younger than criminal organization members and fall within the late teen and early twenties age group. The organization, leadership and structure of street gangs varies widely, with some bordering on the organized criminal organizations we discuss next, but with many only approximating this type of established and organized structure. Street gang members are also less educated than members of criminal organizations and are economically disadvantaged. In addition to this it is the peer group attraction of gang life that draws them to such groups, combined with some promise of making money. Other contributing factors include ethnic marginalization, experience of domestic violence, ineffective parenting, poverty, inability to obtain income, lack of a father figure, additional dependent siblings, and isolation from the larger community (2000; 51-52). While Gordon does not specifically address the issue of Aboriginal gangs, it will be clear in our

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[3] Respondents indicate that gangs in recent years have become more racially/ethnically mixed. Despite this mixing, reports indicate that Aboriginal gangs have retained their homogeneity – they tend to conform more so than other groups, to ethnic boundaries.

analysis below that these factors emerge as especially salient characteristics of the lives of Aboriginal youth.

If we look at some of the Aboriginal street gangs in existence in the prairie region, it also becomes clear that groups such as the Redd Alert, Indian Posse, Alberta Warriors, and the Native Syndicate fit Gordon's description of a street gang. Crime for profit (though less organized than criminal organizations) and violence characterize these street gangs. For example[4], the Indian Posse originally organized in Winnipeg in the late 1980s and early 1990s was unorganized initially but became more organized over time. This gang is involved in low level organized street crime, including drug trafficking, assaults and break and enters. Dependent on more structured criminal organizations for their drugs, Indian Posse members are involved in street level dealing. As is characteristic of most Aboriginal street gangs, the Indian Posse is very active in correctional institutions, using fear, violence and intimidation to recruit non-members and exercise control.

The Manitoba Warriors and the offshoot Alberta Warriors both are considered street gangs, although their strength appears to come primarily from their activities and recruitment in prisons. Both touted as being on the more organized end of the street gang continuum, these groups which started off as Aboriginal political groups, have ties to more organized criminal organizations such as outlaw motorcycle groups. The Redd Alert, according to some reports, originated in Edmonton as an offshoot of the notorious Edmonton Northside Boys. Very active in correctional institutions, the Redd Alert developed in response to aggressive institutional recruitment by gangs such as the Indian Posse and the Manitoba and Alberta Warriors. Aboriginal inmates formed the Redd Alert as an alternative to being forcefully recruited into these other groups.

Street gangs and their prison affiliations are relatively fluid, gaining or waning in strength and numbers as membership changes, and in response to enforcement strategies (Correctional Services Alberta, 2003; Mathews, 2005; Yablonsky, 1973). An example of this is the

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[4] All information in this section regarding the Indian Posse, Manitoba Warriors, Alberta Warriors, Redd Alert and the Edmonton Northside Boys is drawn from: Correctional Services Alberta, March 2003, "Special Interest Offenders", Alberta Solicitor General.

aforementioned Northside Boys, a group comprised of primarily Aboriginal youth ranging in age from thirteen to twenty one, which was very active in the late 1990s. This group more closely resembles Gordon's "wanna-be" groups. They were younger in age than the other groups in his typology, and involved in less organized behaviour. Bullying, violence, and opportunistic crimes are the mainstay of "wanna-bes". Without any particular objectives, "wanna-be" group members tend to fit the profile of hard-core young offenders (Gordon, 2000: 53). Reports indicate that the Northside Boys "wanna-bes" according to our analysis, were easily intimidated by career criminals in the correctional system and qualify as more of a "friendship group" without real leadership structure. They were loosely organized, and with little involvement in organized crime – in Gordon's terms, "wanna-bes".

Gordon's third group, criminal organizations are currently relatively rare in the Aboriginal community in the Prairie provinces. Though some of the street gangs, through their drug trafficking activities and connections with more organized groups, might be moving in this direction, as it now stands criminal organizations don't fit the profile of the bulk of Aboriginal gangs. Criminal business organization members tend to include older males who are better educated than members of street gangs (Gordon, 2000: 50). They are less likely to be economically disadvantaged, likely because of the lucrative nature of their work, and are more likely to have immigrated to Canada (50). Our suggestion, which we return to later in our analysis, is that not only with the "legitimate" world of work, but also within the world of crime, Aboriginal youth are relegated to the more disorganized, less lucrative criminal opportunities because of a variety of reasons, including structural inequality, poverty, discrimination and other factors. They do not make up the bulk of the criminal business organization, but rather are more likely to be found in the street level groups and the "wanna-bes" groups.

A Case Study in Aboriginal Gang Activity in Edmonton, Alberta: As emphasized by key Canadian gang researchers and agency workers (Gordon, 2000; Mathews, 2005; CISS, 2005), gangs are a national and worldwide phenomenon and perhaps they are best understood in their local context. As such we start our analysis by drawing on the official information on gangs in Edmonton as provided by the Edmonton Police Service Gang Unit report (2005) and their pamphlet for public dissemination entitled "Who Are Your Children Hangin' With: A Resource Guide on Youth & Gangs" on gangs in the city and surrounding areas.

Formed in 1999, the Edmonton Police Service (EPS) Gang Unit has received additional resources in both 2001 and 2004, which is an indication of increasing public concern with gang-related activities in the city. The strategies of the Unit are to establish high police visibility in prevalent gang environments, educate members of the community on gangs and their activities on both prevention, intervention and general awareness, provide strong enforcement of the law, develop sources to interdict gang activities, to participate in the development of community solutions, and generally work toward effective solutions to the gang problem.

As is common with most sources of research and official intelligence on gangs, information is vague when it comes to estimating such things as number of gangs and gang members in the city. Much of this it would seem, has to do with the fact that the "gang world" can be highly volatile, both internally, (with memberships changing weekly as members join or exit the gang; are arrested or released from jail; and are injured or killed) and externally (when for example, drug availability changes). In addition, it seems that alliances between groups are rather fluid as well. Nonetheless, at the time of writing of the report, the EPS Gang Unit estimated that there were approximately 19 street gangs (excluding Traditional Organized Crime groups or the Hell's Angels) operating in Edmonton, many of which have been in existence for many years.

As the EPS reports, no two gangs are exactly alike in form or function, their ideals and purposes can be quite different. Similarly, reasons for forming or joining a gang also differ. While most street gang members in the city are between 20 and 25 years of age, gang members can range in age from very young (under 13) to individuals 65 years and older.

Additionally, characteristics such as the ethnic make up of gangs, the economic status of members, and use of violence are as varied as the number of gangs.

Many of the gangs in Edmonton seem to have started as groups of ethnically homogeneous friends, family members or acquaintances that, as the gang grows and criminal activities increase, make alliances with other groups and individuals. Alliances are made on a rational basis, the best partners are those who may best enhance and increase the wealth and power of the gang. In fact, 90 percent of the city's gangs have origins that are based on a friendship network that slowly developed into a criminal network. There is clearly an argument to be made for the

significance of friendship, and in some instances family connections when it comes to gang formation and recruitment. The literature and our data provide strong support for the gang formation process that begins with a "group of friends hanging out" (often with no intention to commit crimes) which evolves into a group of "wanna-bes", and then changes into a street gang as organization and membership increases (Gordon, 2000; Mathews, 2005; Mathews, 1993). Approaching gang formation and gang evolution ("a life-course model of the gang") in this manner suggests possible avenues for gang prevention and intervention which we return to later in the paper.

The Gang Unit also concluded that, despite media constructions that focus on the ethnic nature of gangs, the majority of gangs in the city are comprised of mixed races, and include members of both minority and majority ethnic groups. In addition, street gang structure varies in Edmonton. A relatively small proportion of street gangs in Edmonton follow the stereotypical street gang model. In fact the Gang Unit points out that there is no concrete evidence showing that the majority of gangs within a city currently are or ever were, like those portrayed in the featured films based on Los Angeles gangs the "Crips" and the "Bloods".

Finally, gang members do come from the middle class. "The range of the family and economic status of the gang members can be poverty stricken, lower class, middle class to wealthy" (2005), but the majority of Edmonton gang members is lower class to middle class. In commenting on typical family structure from which gang members can emerge, the officers state that: "there are gangs members who come from dysfunctional broken homes and those who come from supportive cohesive family units. There are members who attend religious gatherings and have supplemented their high school education with College or University" (2005).

Aboriginal street gangs in Edmonton however, are different than 'typical' or the majority of gangs in many ways. First, most Aboriginal groups are ethnically homogeneous and the EPS report also suggests that violence tends to be intra-racial with Aboriginal street gangs. Further, they are more violent than some other gangs, known for their "jumping in" and "jumping out" ordeals. Second, Aboriginal street gangs generally have distinct identifying characteristics including tattoos, graffitized areas that mark territory, clothing and gang paraphernalia, gang symbols, hand signs and a self-chosen name, which is a direct link to the African American and

Latino street gangs in the United States. Aboriginal street gangs generally recruit youth who are poverty stricken and come from dysfunctional broken families. Finally, Aboriginal gangs are also better established in the prison system, some of these gangs actually credit prison processes with their birth and creation.

Our data corroborates the EPS report. The ex-gang members interviewed presented with numerous tattoos associated with gang life and reported that the group they affiliated with had colors. Further, they spoke at length about childhood experiences of poverty and dysfunction and the thrill and sense of belonging that gang life offered them. These data are further supported in the documentary "Gang Aftermath"[5] an ex-gang member speaks about the effect 'gangsta' music and movies had on him as a young boy:

> "I got all mine from movies… I found that [movie] 'Blood In Blood Out'…watched it...it was straight gangster man…it was awesome man…[I thought] that's it, right there…"

Another young man, talks about being a child in the inner-city of Edmonton and how poverty was a pre-cursor to his gang affiliation:

> "When I look around (at the place I grew up) …this was the community league for the Hood – this is where gang member came, the drug dealers, the drunks, drug addicts, the people from the street. … "
>
> "(When I was 10) That was a hard thing to deal with – having mom taking off and not being there…you get up in the morning, sometimes she would be there, sometimes she wouldn't. When she was there, she wouldn't be up to get us ready for school, to cook us breakfast. I would slap something together for me and my little brother, get my little bother dressed and away we went".
>
> "(That's how I grew up), seeing my mother and step-father fight a lot – that's how they handled their problems, by yelling, swearing, screaming and physically assaulting one another. So I thought OK that's how I deal with things".

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[5] Documentary produced by BearPaw Media Productions, 10975 124 Street Edmonton, Alberta. (780) 429-9310.

These powerful recollections help us to understand the lure of gang life for young Aboriginal boys and what gang lifestyles appear to offer them, as an alternative to lives filled with helplessness and hopelessness.

How are Common Perceptions About Gangs Constructed?

We have already discussed the issues relating to defining "gangs". Obviously the manner in which an organization defines "gang" and "gang activities" will affect the collection of data on such groups very directly. But beyond definitional considerations, there are other factors that influence the collection of data relating to gangs. From a social constructionist perspective, social problems become such because an individual or group is able to draw attention to a particular definition of the problem and essentially "create" the problem. Social constructionists additionally consider the impact of social, economic, and political context to the "creation" of social problems (Goode, 2001; Nelson & Robinson, 1999; Rubington & Weinberg, 2002). This is not to deny that gang activities are real. They do cause pain and suffering to victims, young people spend years in prison for crimes committed under the auspices of gaining approval of their gang, injury and death result, families are destroyed.

However, the social constructionist would point to the fact that "gangs" have been a concern in Canadian society since the 1920s. Cameron, in 1943, viewed gangs not as "tightly organized entities, but as loosely configured 'pseudo-communities'"; Yablonsky was writing about gangs as "near groups" characterized by impermanence and diffuse role definitions in 1973 (Mathews, 2005). Rogers (1945) produced the first recorded Canadian piece of work on juveniles in street gangs in Toronto. Canadian authorities were concerned with the "Boy Problem" - boys freely roaming city streets ostensibly looking for trouble as early as the 1920s (Bell, 2002: 16). Significantly, the Canadian media has always played a key role in the propagation of information (sensationalized or not) about gangs in the country. As Young (1993) found, gangs have been depicted in Canadian newspapers as a subject of growing social concern and the product of an ailing society during every wave of urban street gang activity since 1945 (Gordon, 2000: 41).

Mathews (2005) argues that concern about gangs is cyclical. "Interest can be sparked by a change in political beliefs and community values, economic conditions, intergenerational

conflict, negative attitudes toward youth, public fear, political pressure on police to lay charges and reactions to shifting employment or immigration patterns" (204). Importantly, the way a particular problem is defined also influences the kinds of solutions offered in response to the problem. From this perspective, one would argue that while the objective behaviour of "collectivities of youth committing criminal offences" has always been a part of Canadian history, various other factors have influenced the way the behaviour has been constructed – in the media, by parents and agents of social control – at a particular time and in a particular place.

Currently our construction of youth gang activity comprises features including increasing violence, drug-related activities, active recruitment, and particular ethnic composition. In addressing the issue of youth gang violence, we need to critically assess how it is that the current construction of youth gang activity has come to dominate at this point in time, how it varies by region, and why this is the case. Awareness of the social context and the role it plays in constructing the problem will certainly have to be part of constructing a solution.

Gordon offers interesting insight on the role of the media in contributing to the social construction of gang activities (2005). When discussing the social construction of gangs, media reports are a major source of both constructions (i.e. "Asian gangs", "youth gangs") and a primary source of information for the public. The problem is that sometimes groups of individuals are inaccurately referred to as "gangs" in the media. This false labelling facilitates the construction of a problem that either doesn't exist or, while existing, is not a "gang" problem. Gordon describes the case of small groups of offenders in the Vancouver area being referred to in the media as "gangs". In one case a small group of young offenders who, for several weeks, bullied high school students into giving up their cash and possessions, was given the name "Back Alley Boys" by the media. The group neither defined themselves as a "gang" nor did they have any say in the name assigned to them. The "626 gang" was a group of young adults who committed a series of armed robberies over a four-month period in 1992. The name was assigned to them by police and media because of their tendency to use stolen Mazda 626 automobiles during the commission of their crimes, providing another example of a group who neither chose the "gang" name nor saw themselves as a "gang" (2005: 47).

The power of the media to construct groups of young people into "gangs" is paralleled by similar processes that occur in prisons when convicted offenders are falsely labelled by officials as "gang" members. Mercredi (2000) reports that Aboriginal offenders behind bars are subjected to institutional labelling which results in placement into one of two broad categories: gang member or non-gang member. Mercredi argues that police and court labelling of Aboriginal "gang" members as members of a criminal organization "is a response to the public's fear of gangs and a reaction to public pressure by "white" politicians, with the help of the white media, to create the image of Aboriginal youth as dangerous and violence criminals" (8).

Perception of Aboriginal Gangs

The ways in which the gang threat is portrayed and constructed in the media and by agents of social control affects gangs, their members, and members of the public. Using 'scripts' created by the media filled with myths and stereotypes about a group of people or area of interest is convenient for society. Many people rely on these scripts – convenient short cuts that are created by media and propaganda – to understand our world. How do you deal with youth crime? "Toughen up" the *Youth Criminal Justice Act*, send "bad guys" (and girls) to jail for a very long time, make parole eligibility criteria more restrictive and keep the problem away from our homes and families. Easy. Simple. Quick fix.

There is nothing intentionally malicious or hurtful in these thoughts and actions. Carefully researching youth crime, rehabilitation and reintegration so that one can understand the complexity of the issues and carefully weigh all solutions is a time consuming activity. Considering the vast number of these issues in our increasingly global world, one could spend days and nights informing oneself of current and world events leaving little to no time for our day-to day lives. Social constructionism and the short cuts we take to understand the world, while obscuring our understanding of events, issues and situations, becomes a practical way of dealing with life. While using scripts constructed by others can work, most often it increases our collective ignorance and naivety.

(Mis)understandings of Aboriginal gangs are to a certain degree the result of socially constructed processes. The reason for discussing these processes is to dispel some of the myths

surrounding the groups, increase awareness and understanding, and work toward positive and effective solutions that are perhaps more informed than simply "putting people in jail and throwing away the key", or "toughening up" as our response to young people's misbehaviours.

How does social constructionism impact on the issue of Aboriginal gangs? There are several ways in which the processes described above apply to gangs and lead to misinformation and perhaps misguided responses to the problem. Part of the "construction" of gangs in the media and by politicians is to resort to stereotyping by ethnic group. We read and hear of the "Asian" gang problem, the problem of Jamaican Blacks in the east, and "Aboriginal gangs". We don't often hear of "Caucasian" or "White" gangs. Racial and ethnic stereotyping leads to processes such as racial profiling and creates increased misunderstanding, labelling, mistrust and hostility between groups.

However, by lumping all these groups together and referring to them as various components or pieces of 'one big gang problem' (i.e. whether Asian or Aboriginal, society is faced with "ethnic" hoodlums wreaking havoc on mainstream society), we conflate the uniqueness of each group we are dealing with. It is entirely possible that the various "ethnic" gangs referred to, and the "white" gangs we never hear of, are at base caused by different processes. While more research is needed to ascertain whether this particular speculation has any validity, if we for a moment consider this to be a possibility, then lumping all these groups together, and attempting to deal with them all in the same way, might prove futile.

For instance, Aboriginal gangs appear to have different causes and characteristics than other gangs. Their recruitment processes are considerably more violent than other gangs. Whereas other groups tend to "court" potential members by buying them gifts and showing them how wonderful and lucrative gang life can be, Aboriginal gangs subject new recruits to a "jumping in" process where the recruit is beaten by many gang members for a set period of time. Aboriginal gangs are more apt to follow the "standard" for gangs in the United States, where tattoos, hand symbols, and strict chains of command define gang membership and function. In this sense Aboriginal gangs are an anomaly on the Canadian gang landscape. When we refer to Aboriginal gangs in the media as "just another example" of young people today being attracted to a criminal lifestyle, and when the media and others construct all "ethnic" gangs in this manner,

we lose sight of what are likely very significant differences. This is not to deny that there are many similarities among and between gangs, but it is the existence of these differences that are obscured in public discussions of the problem.

In this way, the way the problem is constructed works against constructive and unique approaches to different gangs. Media constructions, which are the public's major source of information on gangs, also do a disservice to the topic when they play into the sensationalized "us" versus "them" dichotomy. Certainly criminals and violent individuals warrant the label "other"; they do after all cause harm, pain, suffering, and death within our communities. However, in reverting to such simple constructionist techniques and categories, media constructions tend to revisit notions from our past. Images of residential school authorities abusing and forcefully restraining "untamed savages" in order to "civilize and humanize" them come to mind. "Outsider" and "insider" status go a long way to help us understand ways in which many of our social problems are presented by authorities and the media.

While we certainly do not condone gang behaviour, the fact is that exaggerating the "otherness" of gang members, perhaps by invoking racial and ethnic stereotypes, encourages a strong and authoritative response to the situation. Presenting Aboriginal gang members as victims of a system that discriminates, perpetuates poverty, makes educational attainment difficult, and fails to provide employment will not sell newspapers. We don't want to see Aboriginal gang members as victims of anything. To do so would force us to look at the social and structural factors which have contributed to their involvement in such behaviour to start with. It is much easier to simply point our fingers at the nasty "other" who is destroying our communities.

Behind bars, in our prisons, constructionist processes, overlapping with labeling processes have made it so that inaccurate labeling of "Aboriginal gang members" is occurring. We saw earlier, Mercredi's (2000) important findings regarding the "slotting" of Aboriginal inmates into either the "gang" or "non-gang" category. Again the construction of myths of this kind means that individuals may be deprived of opportunities for programming and transfer to less secure facilities because of the false label. Because of the prevalence of Aboriginal gangs behind bars,

it is not a far stretch to see how any Aboriginal inmate would immediately be at a disadvantage in terms of false labeling.

Similarly on the street Aboriginal youth, because of the notoriety Aboriginal gangs have attained in media accounts, are at a greater risk of having to prove they are not gang members before others will trust them, teach them, hire them, or interact with them. Considering the structural problems we discuss below, the added burden of attempting to shed two powerful labels in mainstream society – first, that of Aboriginal, second that of potential Aboriginal gang members – become onerous hurdles that must be crossed prior to any sort of meaningful interaction.

Gangs, Aboriginal or other, can and do capitalize on the 'rep' they have in the public domain. Emphasizing the material gain and protection the gang can offer potential recruits, these gangs move into areas where they know vulnerable youth exist. Mainstream society's construction of gangs as a problem – lumping them together into this great unknown force to be reckoned with – has, in fact, worked toward the power of the gangs, by pushing vulnerable, at-risk youth straight into the arms of the all-to welcoming criminal groups. First and foremost, socially constructed myths and exaggerations surrounding gangs must be deconstructed and dispelled. The uniqueness and root cases of these groups, the functions they fulfill and the *raison d'être* for their existence must be investigated and shared so that constructive, well thought-out and relevant means of dealing with them can be found.

While media and criminal justice system constructions certainly exacerbate the "gang" problem and lead to misinformation and the propagation of myths surrounding the issue, agencies and researchers have managed to collect data regarding the prevalence and incidence of gang activities in Canada. We would be remiss to take these data at face value, simply because of issues relating to definitional differences between jurisdictions, regional variations in the problem itself, and some of the construction-related issues we've discussed. For example, police in Calgary did not acknowledge a "gang" problem in the city until 2003, following public outcry after a rash of drive-by shootings (Mathews, 2005: 205). The Montreal Police Department has had a Gang Unit since 1987 (Symons, 1999); the Edmonton City Police created their Gang Unit

in 1999. Nonetheless, we must start somewhere with our understanding of the prevalence of gang activity and these numbers provide a good place to start.

Exploring Why Aboriginal Individuals Join Gangs

Gangs serve a function both inside and outside institutional walls. Why individuals join gangs is a complex issue and it is one that has been the focus of research efforts since the early 1900s (Cohen, 1965; Cloward and Ohlin, 1960; Gordon, 1995; Horowitz, 1987; Joe and Robinson, 1980; Klein, 1971; Mathews, 1993; Sutherland, 1939; Thrasher, 1927; Yablonsky, 1959). The gang can be a source of both self-esteem and identity for "lost" youth. For these reasons, it is likely that the gang has an appeal to youth coming from broken homes, single parent families, and abusive situations. The gang becomes a surrogate family for these disenfranchised young people. In addition to this, the gang can also serve as an economic organization, providing money to its members. As a social organization, the gang unit is a source of pro-criminal entertainment, status, excitement, camaraderie, prestige, and protection. However, the gang can also be a source of punishment, pain, assignment of criminal tasks, and can plague individuals with the constant threat of lost membership.

Within prison, a gang can offer new inmates exactly what they require in their new, hostile environment: support and protection. From this perspective, joining a gang, or making the move to become a recruit, seems to make sense. Gangs are functional for individuals in this situation. If individuals are at risk for assault and victimization because they are members of a visible minority group, joining an ethnic or culturally-based gang may protect them from such assault. Predatory inmates exist and vulnerable inmates do what it takes to avoid and prevent becoming victims. However, we also know that membership in gangs open individuals up to increased assault rates through predation from rival gangs and from disciplinary tactics within one's own gang.

Gang membership is a double-edged sword and individuals join for a variety of reasons. Survival and protection in prison may be one reason. Joining may be a band-aid solution to a variety of deeper, core issues and internal conflicts. Yet, despite the drawbacks, the risk of

injury, criminal record, and death, youth and adults continue to turn to this alternative, criminal lifestyle.

Building a Profile of Youth-at Risk of Being Recruited

There are many ways of explaining criminal behaviour. Some biological theorists focus on an individual's genetic make-up, their constitution. Others look at diet, hormones, and some look at an interplay between biological and social factors. Psychological theorists focus on childhood experiences, brain disorders, or personality factors. The gang phenomenon is interesting because it combines many of these theoretical approaches to criminal behaviour but it also taps into the important sociological processes relating to "groups" and how these processes shape individual behaviour.

One sociological theory that seems able to address adequately the findings regarding gangs, and in particular Aboriginal gangs, is Bond Theory. Several decades ago, Hirschi (1969) asked us to consider this: "Why don't more people commit crimes?" He reversed the "usual" question regarding criminal behaviour. In his estimation, conformity is the behaviour that warrants our investigation. After all, crime pays, doesn't it? Stealing is less labour intensive than having to work and save money to buy things. Cheating on exams in school is easier and less labour intensive than having to spend hours studying. According to this perspective, criminal behaviours should be appealing to all of us because crime (without repercussion) is the easiest way to get ahead. Starting with the assumption that humans are motivated by the hedonistic principle – maximize pleasure, minimize pain – most humans would choose crime if given the choice, because it is the 'easy way out' so to speak.

Why don't more of us commit crime? The answer, according to this perspective is really quite simple. It is because, in general, humans are bonded to conventional society. Most individuals have family and friends who they do not want to disappoint. We do not want them to have to suffer the humiliation of seeing our names plastered in the newspapers for committing crime; to have to drag them into court with us and be our support system; or to have them visit us in prison. Most of us have others in our lives who we respect, love and care about and who

conform to the accepted rules of society. This helps prevent us from taking the easy way out. This Hirschi referred to as the "attachment" part of the bond.

In addition to attachment, most people also are "committed" to conventional society – we have conventional jobs, work connections, people who we don't want to let down – people who are counting on us to be law-abiding. We are also "involved" in conventional society in our day-to-day lives. Finally, most people "believe" in the system. We know that to get ahead we need to work hard, sacrifice, and defer gratification because that is how one becomes successful. This belief system has been ingrained in individuals from a very young age.

Using this line of reasoning and applying it to Aboriginal youth today in Canadian society, the question truly becomes: "Why aren't more Aboriginal youth involved in gangs?" Let us explain why, drawing on the data we have collected.

Family: Family figures prominently in Hirschi's theory. After all, according to Bond theory, it is in the family that a child's first conventional bonds to society are established. It is during the adolescent years when these initial bonds are built upon and strengthened. In attempting to explain Aboriginal youth and young adult gang involvement, family must be considered. One of our respondents reports that at the age of seven, he was taken away from his mother who was a prostitute. He also reports that once involved in the gang, it was children - street kids without close family – whom the gang targeted for recruitment. Kids without a family bond. As he states: "…these kids want love and respect and the gang provided that family for them." Another respondent reports having "no role models, no community support and no connection with his family".

In correctional institutions, this lack of family bonding is exacerbated by the isolation and alienation experienced by convicted offenders. From our prison sample we found evidence for this. "The gang is a substitute family"[6]. "A gang provides companionship, support, protection". A common response from participants is that individuals who join gangs, in or outside the institutional setting, are people who either have dysfunctional families or lack nurturing and

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[6] Quotes in this format throughout the report are excerpts taken directly from the interviews conducted during the course of this research. Respondents haves not been named, nor their institution listed, to ensure anonymity.

caring at the familial level. People who join institutional gangs get "something" from the gang, usually a sense of belonging. According to this respondent people who join are "not wanted with other people – loners with nothing going on in their lives". Bond theory emphasizes that this lack of belonging, usually associated with the development of healthy family ties, is lacking for both street gangs members, and institutional gangs members, which follows since the latter group are a subset of the former.

While weak family bonds are not specific to any social, ethnic, or economic category, the reality is that certain segments of the population are at greater risk for family-based problems, which invariably contribute to weak bonding. Aboriginal families are one such group. The importance of family and extended family has always been emphasized among Aboriginal peoples. Raising children, caring and respect for the elderly have always been communal activities and have remained integral to Aboriginal culture. Bonding, belonging, a sense of being part of something larger than oneself forms the basis of Aboriginal spirituality and was not an issue for Aboriginal groups prior to colonization.

For generations, since the colonization of First Nations peoples, their land, and their lifestyle, traditional family practices have been adversely affected. Many argue the effect has been devastating. Others point to the power of these groups to retain much of what family means in the face of powerful, destructive outside forces. In other words, while much damage has been done, much has been preserved It is this cultural preservation which Aboriginal communities are building on and strengthening as groups and communities become increasingly active in addressing past harms. Nonetheless, the fact is that Aboriginal families have suffered as a result of colonization and the resultant residential school policies which separated children from parents, and attempted to destroy culture, language, lifestyle, spirituality – belonging.

As has been documented elsewhere in more detail (Canada, 1996; Fornier & Crey, 1997; McKenzie, Seidl, & Bone, 1995; Hudson, 1997; Crisjohn, Young & Maraun, 1997), part of the legacy of colonialism is family breakdown, child and spousal abuse, the abuse of substances and the resultant violence that often accompanies such abuse. The unfortunate legacy of residential schools and attempts to forcefully assimilate Aboriginal people also include high numbers of Aboriginal youth being placed under state care, into foster homes and other institutions.

Trevethan and her colleagues (2002) found in their study on Aboriginal offenders and their childhood experiences that significantly larger proportions of Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal offenders were involved in the child welfare system when they were children (63% versus 36% respectively). These researchers also found that a significantly larger proportion of Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal offenders had an unstable childhood (36% versus 26% respectively) with the difference being most pronounced during the teenage years, when 50% of Aboriginal offenders reported such instability compared to 32% of non-Aboriginals.

Within the city of Edmonton, Aboriginal children and youth are over six times more likely to receive child protection services that non-Aboriginal children and youth (Aboriginal Edmonton, 2005: 42). According to one incarcerated ex-gang member, "kids within the family services system were especially attractive" to the gang as targets for recruitment. What are the implications of this history and current state of affairs for family, for bonding within the family, and for feelings of belonging?

When applying Hirschi's Bond theory to the issue of gangs, either street or institutional, it is imperative to consider the bigger picture. The effect of larger social, economic, and cultural processes which contribute to the current state of affairs, and which led to one of our original questions: Why don't more Aboriginal youth and young adults join gangs? If family bonding is part of the equation, we should expect higher numbers because of the high levels of alienation, family breakdown, and feelings of despair which characterize life on many reserves and which are a too familiar way life for many Aboriginal people.

School: Aboriginal people are attending Universities in record numbers and rates of high school completion are higher today than they were ten years ago. In the Edmonton area the percentage of Aboriginal women aged 20-24 who have completed post-secondary education has almost doubled to 30% between 1981 and 2001. The rate for all women aged 20-24 is 48%. During the same period, the percentage of Aboriginal persons aged 15-24 attending school increased by two-thirds to over 50%, only slightly lower than for the general population (Aboriginal Edmonton, 2005).

But despite the good news and the work being done in Aboriginal communities to encourage children and adolescents to complete their education and move onto post secondary institutions, the fact is that Aboriginal dropout rates are still far above the national average. While 29% of adults in Edmonton's general population have not completed high school, 43% of Aboriginal adults had less than a high school education (2005: 37). The percentage of Aboriginal males, aged 20-24, not attending school, who have completed post-secondary education dropped from 34% to 27% between 1981 and 2001, compared to 44% for all men in that age category (2005).

Bond theory points to the educational system as another source of conventional support, role models, and a source of healthy bonding for young people. Considering the devastating impacts of residential schools on the general Aboriginal population in Canada (Canada, 1996), it is logical to expect that there are residual issues that remain between Aboriginal individuals, families and communities and the school system. This difficult relationship may help explain why many Aboriginal children still experience difficulty identifying with teachers, schools, and the educational process in general. One of our respondents recalls being called a "dumb little Indian who would never amount to anything" by one of his school teachers, which illuminates the difficulties described by ex-gang members who were interviewed regarding their childhood school experiences. Evidence from the interviews, such as the incident referred to above, suggest there is a link between poor school experiences and being at-risk of adopting gang lifestyles.

Work: Lower levels of education and a lack of post-secondary education translates into problems finding well paying employment. Aboriginal people face unemployment rates two to three times as high as for the total population (Lindsey, 2006: 199). High rates of unemployment among Aboriginal people are another indicator of the lack of bonding to conventional society they experience. In addition to this, unemployment is an indicator of the structural inequality this group experiences in our country. It is structural because of the complex and interconnected association between factors such as education, strong family support, and family support for education, lack of role models, high rates of unemployment from generation to generation, substance abuse and family abuse.

All of these factors indicate the subordinate position of Aboriginal people in Canadian society. While there are Aboriginal people who are highly educated, who have well paying jobs, who do not experience the type of subordination we described above, there is also a high Aboriginal unemployment rate. Aboriginal people who do find work are paid less for it. In 2000, average employment income for a working Aboriginal person was $21,485, compared to $32,183 for the average working Canadian. Median employment income was only $16,040 for Aboriginal people compared to $26,111 for the total population (Lindsey, 2006: 199). These are indicators of a structural problem. It is the position of these authors that without a structural response (i.e. government policy, government funding, institutional change), the structural inequality will persist, despite the best efforts of individuals and individual communities working on their own.

Lack of good jobs on reserves and elsewhere for Aboriginal people mean that this legitimate avenue for success and for bonding to conventional society is simply not there. As one respondent reports, he began drug running for gang member when he was 12 years old and began selling drugs by the age of 14:

> "On the reserve gang members were attractive because they had money and what they had looked like a good life, an opportunity to get away from the environment of the reserve."

Another ex-gang member states that:

> "reserves are especially easy targets for potential recruitment because the kids in reserves want to be perceived as cool, these kids have nothing or are very poor and the gang members seem to be the best alternative".

Legitimate opportunities are in relatively short supply for people, Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal, who do not have the education, training, or opportunity to work.

Within correctional facilities, where institutional work assignments are increasingly rare and where daily wages range from nothing (for inmates who can not or will not find work) to just under $7.00, the drug trade behind bars can be tempting. As we discuss later in this paper, links between street and prison gangs make it possible for imprisoned gang members to make more money from the drug trade and prostitution rings, for example, than they could earn legitimately

while serving their sentences. As respondents from our sample point out, "drugs, money, and excitement" all linked directly to drugs, are highly desirable commodities whether behind prison walls or outside those walls.

The classic criminological theories created by Merton (1968) and Cloward and Ohlin (1960) certainly apply here to whatever group we are talking about. Groups of people who do not have access to legitimate work, who do not have legitimate opportunities, will innovate in order to make money and achieve success. One option for their 'innovation' is the illegitimate opportunity structure. In other words, individuals who are shut out of the legitimate opportunity structure often find a niche, perhaps the gang lifestyle, in the illegitimate opportunity structure.

Peers: Peers, be they "pro-social" or "deviant", are important to young people. In fact adolescence is the time in the life cycle when young people are inclined to develop peer friendships and rely less on familial supports as a way of developing independence and asserting themselves. Hirschi recognized the importance of peers to bonding, though his initial theorizing that bonding, regardless of whether bonding occurred with conventional or delinquent peers, was modified later to acknowledge that developing bonds with antisocial peers could facilitate delinquent behaviour instead of guard against it.

Other theories, notably Differential Association Theory (Sutherland, 1939), stressed the importance of peer group to behaviour. The premise behind differential association theory is that a person becomes a criminal when he or she perceives more benefits than unfavourable consequences, with respect to violating the law. In other words, there are more 'pros' than 'cons' (Sutherland, 1939 in Siegel and McCormick, 2006).

The "definitions" Sutherland refers to vary in intensity and duration among other things, and this will affect the extent to which the definitions influence behaviour. For example, criminal parents or family members will have more intensity and priority in the life of a young person, so would delinquent peers to whom the young person feels close and with whom s/he spends a lot of time. Less influential, but ostensibly still important (and we suspect Sutherland would allow for this considering changes that have occurred in society since the 1930s) would be the influence of television and the Internet. We would be remiss to discount the powerful imagery

of media sensationalizing of the "gangsta" lifestyle. Movies, music, and television all glorify the life, reinforcing the idea that crime and violence not only are normative, but pay – and pay very well.

From our interviews there emerged a clear picture of the importance of peers to the gang recruitment process. For the sake of this discussion we include in our category of "peers", individuals who are also family members, in addition to being peers. Family involvement in gangs is clearly a precursor to gang involvement for the ex-gang members interviewed. One subject, originally from Winnipeg, started by stating that his family was involved in the gang lifestyle. Another, from Saskatoon, stated he was:

> "surrounded by family members who were gang members. I had no connection with my family otherwise – they were alcoholics and drug addicts."

This story was common among our ex-gang member sample.

Also a common theme is the importance of reputation and respect from peers. It seems that among the Aboriginal young people in our study, lack of respect, lack of self-esteem, and the pursuit of these attributes led to gang involvement. Gangs, as peer groups, are a source of respect – at least in the eyes of recruits. The ex-gang member from Winnipeg states he "…wanted a reputation. I spent time in neighbourhood parks and earned a reputation from dealing drugs and standing up to other gang members." If there is a lack of bonding in the home, marginalized youth will seek respect elsewhere. Surrounded by other like-situated youth, combined with family and friends already gang involved, and the pathway to gang involvement seems rather straightforward. As Sutherland would say, in the case of disenfranchised youth in urban and rural areas, an environment abundant in criminal "definitions" and criminal "associations" makes this illegitimate career pathway almost inevitable. Sutherland's theory implies that the side with the most, and the most significant, "definitions" will win out. A youngster surrounded by pro-social definitions – doctor/teacher parents, siblings who are engaged in sport or art, friends who are high achievers in school – will likely follow the pro-social route and find respect and recognition in legitimate, legal pursuits.

Furthermore, these pro-social associations, in addition to influencing the 'route' the young person takes, are also a source of learning. The associations teach individuals the 'tricks of the trade' whether they be pro-social, for example how to study effectively. On the other hand, a young person who is surrounded by family members already well ensconced in a gang lifestyle, surrounded by poverty and unemployment, associating with friends who skip school and instead make money by drug running, is more likely to follow the illegitimate/criminal route characterizing the lifestyle of his or her close associates. Importantly, the anti-social associations in this case, teach the individual more criminal techniques for being successful in crime, for example, how to evade police while on a drug run.

The "peer" association is complicated by a twist that even Sutherland couldn't predict. We place "peer" in quotation marks because another common theme among our sample is the importance of gangs, street and prison, for protection from unsavoury "peers". So while Sutherland argued that peers are an important source of definitions influencing either criminal or non-criminal behaviour, gang research indicates that peers can actually push some youth into gang associations out of a need for protection. Whether the need is real or perceived is irrelevant. Youth feel they need protection and so turn to groups/gangs for help. One of our ex-gang members relates a situation from his youth where his city neighbourhood "had problems" with another nearby neighbourhood so he "started his own crew to protect himself". He states "most kids joining a gang are attracted to the lifestyle as it provides them with protection from other gang members and from life".

The situation, again, is exacerbated within prisons. Redd Alert for example was originally a street gang but spread its tentacles into the prison system. Originally this street gang/rap group developed with the intention of fighting crime and drugs, and providing healthy alternatives to Aboriginal youth. As one respondent relays in telling his interpretation of the group's history:

> "They were there to support Aboriginal kids but these are unhealthy people getting together to do this type of thing dealing with their own substance abuse issues. So they are going to fall off the wagon as they are trying to do this and their importation into the [drug] business is because some of their membership found themselves in prison over some of the things they were doing and they had no protection. They were being run and intimidated by IP [Indian Posse] and Warriors, which at that time was considered the original gang from Manitoba…"

Apparently, the "prison branch" of the Redd Alert was based in the dual objectives of protecting their Aboriginal 'bros' from intimidation at the hands of the Indian Posse and Warriors, and protecting Alberta Aboriginal youth from these 'outsiders' (initially coming from Manitoba). In doing so, they became a "gang" recognized by the correctional system and police. Their original goal of promoting healthy lifestyles for Aboriginal youth was abandoned. Redd Alert is now a rival to some of the longer established gangs they developed in response to.

Regardless of origins, the fact is that prisoners feel the need for protection and find it in prison gangs. Gangs are attractive and, in many cases, at least initially, a necessity to "young, scared, intimidated inmates who are not strong enough to stand on their own. The gang provides protection." "Young people feel it's their only choice for safety and to be part of a 'family type' group and supportive peers" (ex-gang member respondent). The value of gangs behind bars for protection is reinforced by the statement from three of our ex-gang members who report leaving the gang once they left prison.

Our sample and analysis confirm previous research findings regarding the formation of gangs. Gangs are functional for a variety of reasons. Mathews (2005) draws on various theories to explain the genesis of gangs, beginning with social disorganization theory. While we chose to centre our analysis on bond theory, the fact is that social disorganization as described by Park and Burgess, and then Shaw and McKay in the 1920s is relevant as well. Social disorganization theory is a community-level theory which emphasizes social disorganization or negative social forces as contributors to delinquency. These negative social forces are found in neighbourhoods characterized by poverty, class conflict, easy access to guns and drugs, and other unsavoury items and activities, limited social and economic opportunities, as well as discrimination and distrust of police. The researchers at the time found that certain neighbourhoods in the city of Chicago were characterized by 'disorder' - they lacked informal social controls. We have integrated this notion of social disorganization with Hirschi's concept of social bonding. After all, what is informal social control, if not social bonding? Informal social control refers to things such as parental supervision and involvement in legitimate activities such as being monitored by employers, teachers, and coaches. Bonding it seems is integral to social organization.

Mathews (1993; 2005) also reports on research studies of the family which provide support for the influence of ineffective parenting, chaotic communication patterns, disorganization, and parent drug or alcohol abuse, incest and family violence, other gang members in the family, and ineffective parenting or lack of strong parental role models as influences on the decision to join a gang. School-related factors include academic failure and behavioural problems, lack of interest in school, and negative labeling by teachers - so-called "push" factors for youth gang involvement. Falling through the cracks at school can make the lure of gangs that much more tempting (Esbensen & Deschenes, 1998; Hill et al., 1999; Maxson et al., 1998). A lack of community supports and resources which transcend ethnicity, cultural or socioeconomic factors, the type of factors theorists from the social disorganization school of thought suggested long ago to be crucial factors to gang formation, also suggest a lack of bonding – there is nothing to bond to.

It would appear from our analysis that social bonding does indeed matter and does indeed offer a partial explanation for why it is that Aboriginal youth and young adults would be attracted to gangs both on the street and in prison. Weak bonding to family, school, work, and positive peers leave vacancies for the gang to move in with all it has to offer. The weak bonding has also been implicated in low levels of self-esteem, a longing for belonging, respect, love, and support, which again, the gang can supposedly offer. Interestingly, these factors which we link to social bonding are also offered as reasons for joining gangs under the auspices of what are termed "psychological" approaches to youth gang involvement. These psychological approaches tend to focus on "push" and "pull" factors associated with youth gang involvement. Listed under the psychological approach are such things as: doing poorly in school, thrill seeking and a need to take risks, prior behaviour problems and the early onset of antisocial behaviour. Factors also include: a need for status, identity, affiliation, and protection, attitudes supportive of deviance, aggression, the existence of normalcy in the family, peer groups, and school contexts, childhood maltreatment and alcohol and drug use. These factors also appeared in our more sociological theoretical analysis. It would seem that regardless of whether we define the factors as sociological or psychological they consistently emerge as contributing factors to youth gang involvement.

In our analysis, we also saw, albeit briefly, that the lack of bonding many Aboriginal youth feel cannot be "blamed" on the "individualistic" explanations. In Alberta, Aboriginal youth are 4.5 times more likely to be young offenders (Edmonton Urban Aboriginal Accord Initiative, 2005: 45). This is not indicative of individuals making bad choices that get them into trouble. This is indicative of a system that is faulty. It is not individual families who experience high rates of substance abuse and/or family abuse, rather the problem is systemic and is linked to broader processes, historic events and institutional problems that began long before the issue of gangs was even a distant reality. We cannot address gangs without contextualizing this social phenomenon. We cannot truly understand it without looking at the "bigger picture". That bigger picture includes many things including bonding, as discussed above, structured inequality, lack of opportunity, and something heretofore unmentioned: the power of labelling.

Labelling: According to conflict theory, young people join gangs as a result of their feelings of marginalization. The shared feeling of being outsiders may be related to their socio-economic status, religious affiliation, cultural background, or other identity-forming influences (Mathews, 2005: 210). The disenfranchised youth band together for support, camaraderie and protection. Sometimes an additional result can be antisocial and illegal activities. To this situation, labelling theory offers the important component of stigmatization by authorities, whether they are parents, teachers, police officers, or others. Negative labels can propel the marginalized youth further into the so-called deviant subculture. Having been rejected by mainstream society, the welcoming arms of their fellow comrades, similarly labelled, seem like the best and perhaps only choice for support and feelings of belonging. In a sense then, labelling theorists credit social control agents and other authority figures in some instances with the creation, and certainly the perpetuation and solidification of deviant groups and subcultures. The suggestion is that if we could avoid labelling, we could prevent the formation of criminal careers, and for our purposes in this paper, the attractiveness and "staying power" of gangs.

Where does labelling come from? Quite simply, insiders label people different from themselves as outsiders. And so begins the labelling process, the process of exclusion. What connotes difference? A variety of things including: behaviour, appearance, cultural background, religious affiliation, and socio-economic status. And the list goes on. In the case of Aboriginal people, drawing on some of the information cited earlier, the labelling process began when the

negative effects of colonization began. Negative labels and stigmatization have followed. How do we know that Aboriginal people are one group in Canadian society that is labelled? We see it in individual situations, like the story of one of our respondents and his experiences in school that was mentioned earlier. We see evidence of it from the interviews conducted by Ovide Mercredi in his 2000 study on Aboriginal offenders in the federal correctional system. Mercredi found that former and active members of "Aboriginal youth gangs" in prisons "take great exception to the institutional practice of labelling Aboriginal offenders who are in custody into two broad categories: gang member or non-gang member" (7). The perception is that this practice is "a license for institutional authorities to exercise even more discrimination than the "institutional racism" allegedly practiced against Aboriginal offenders" (7). Such labelling, according to Mercredi's report means that Aboriginal offenders behind bars are subject to a "double jeopardy" in that they face discriminatory treatment twice: once as an Aboriginal offender and then again as a "labelled" gang member.

The labelling occurs individually, but significantly for Aboriginal people, the labelling is also systemic. Aboriginal overrepresentation in the criminal justice system is a fact. While comprising approximately three percent of the general population, Aboriginal people make up 17 percent of the federal correctional population. This number is much higher in the Prairie Provinces. While it is possible that Aboriginal people commit more crime than other groups in society, it can be argued that the system exacerbates this difference by targeting this group of people. Countless studies provide evidence for discrimination at all stages of the criminal justice process. Police are more likely to over-police and charge Aboriginal people and the courts are more likely to mete out stiffer sentences to members of this group. Aboriginal offenders are less likely to be assessed down into medium and minimum security institutions, and are less likely to be released from prison on parole (Mercredi, 2000: 7).

The systemic labelling – systemic discrimination - is much more insidious than this, however. Witness the Saskatoon police force and their "Starlight Tours"[7]. Witness the 911 calls

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[7] For decades, rumours in Saskatoon suggested that some officers of the city's police service would respond to reports of intoxicated Aboriginal residents by picking them up, driving them to areas outside the city, and then leaving them there to walk home and sober up. With the 2004 inquiry into Neil Stonechild's 1990 death, Saskatoon's Starlight tours changed from rumour to fact.

in Winnipeg in February 2000 when the calls for help by two Métis women who feared for their lives, were ignored, displaced, and dealt with inappropriately because they were intoxicated-sounding Métis women from a notoriously poor part of the city.

How does labelling contribute to gang involvement? Let us turn to one of our ex-gang members for his insight on the topic. "The police are not trusted because of a history of racism, like finding gang members, taking off their shoes and leaving them in rival gang territory." This individual also describes how "police called them a gang so they began to act that way and identifying themselves that way". It is not a far leap to see how disenfranchised youth labelled as gang members by authorities would fall into that role relatively easily. For how long can one protest one's innocence (or in this case, non-gang affiliation) before it seems futile to do so and easier to just concede? Considering the larger "battles" these children are faced with such as family abuse, substance abuse, violence, and school problems, it is understandable that fighting a false label may result not only in concession but a "giving in", particularly when family members or peers are encouraging the young person to in fact join a gang. At any rate, whether directly or indirectly, it appears that labelling plays a key role in the creation and perpetuation of gang involvement.

Gangs can be a source of positive labels – certainly within the group itself. As one member from our correctional services employee sample attests to:

> "with the Redd Alert – lots of them found recognition in gangs. They hadn't had that before – they were abused, put down all their lives. They got in the gang and had a name. 'I'm somebody'. They got recognition and a sense of belonging."

Our respondents indicate that gang members are people who had "nothing going" for them and joined as a means of finding recognition and respect. Membership in a gang may be a means for increasing one's status in a particular community. Gangs offer members the opportunity to feel a sense of self-worth and a sense of identity. Belonging to something "bigger than themselves" can make people feel important. Aboriginal gangs have developed extensive hand signals, language and artwork, including tattoos that are specific to their gangs. They wear certain colours and in many ways mimic the more established American gangs such as the Bloods and Crips. These types of identifying marks are powerful and symbolic labels. Labelling

is a source of not only respect within the gang, but bodily markings and clothing signify to gang members the exclusivity of their group, their close affiliation and the joint sharing of labels. Labels in fact reinforce group membership.

Group membership is a significant component to human interaction and feelings of self-worth. No one wants to feel like or be treated as an outsider. Being part of a "gang" fulfils a need for social interaction and a feeling of importance on the part of individuals who may lack such a response from conventional, law-abiding society. It provides a positive label, at least within the group itself, for individuals who may never have experienced the respect and feelings of self-worth that accompany that kind of identification. The lack of such feelings of self-worth is exacerbated by the prison experience. It is here where we see a good deal of recruitment into gangs, and into Aboriginal gangs in particular.

Describing the Connection between Aboriginal Street Gangs and Institutional Gangs

In addition to the types of gangs operating in correctional facilities, it is also important for officers to be aware of the *institutional gang - street gang connections* that exist. The exact direction of the relationship between the two is unclear. Some researchers argue that "gangs in corrections are a manifestation of street gangs" (Toller and Tsagaris, 1996: 111; Welling, 1994), others claim that the opposite is more likely (Allender and Marcell, 2003; Tischler, 1999). Regardless of the direction of the relationship, most researchers agree that the connection between institutional and street gangs is a close one. For this reason, "knowing the dynamics of local street gangs is the first step toward understanding institutional gangs" (Toller and Tsagaris, 1996: 111). Several observers point out that street gangs today are becoming more sophisticated, more prevalent, and more criminally active. Numbers and types of street gangs are increasing. Street gangs are becoming more violent, more powerful, and more attractive to people living in poverty, who are often inner city youth who see no other alternative to a life of crime and gang involvement. The street gang-institutional gang connection exists and Canadian correctional personnel are well aware of the pervasiveness of inmates who have connections to illicit activities on the street, power and resources outside the walls of correctional facilities. Our

respondents confirm the existence of connections between the street and institutional gangs but the precise direction of the association is unclear.

It appears then, that prisons inherit the "problems from our street" and vice versa. This connection points to the need for an approach to dealing with gang issues that are based both in correctional facilities and in the community. Both are connected since community members work in the facilities, inmates come from communities, as do their families who continue to reside in communities while their loved ones serve time. Aboriginal overrepresentation in correctional facilities means that any approach to dealing with Aboriginal street gangs necessitates dealing with Aboriginal prison gangs as well. Dealing with one would be relatively fruitless since the two are so intimately connected. For example, consider the scenario where a young member of the Indian Posse is effectively "reached" by community workers. He is successfully "removed" from the gang lifestyle. He may find himself imprisoned for an offence unrelated to his former gang lifestyle. Once in prison, he turns to his former gang associates for protection and material benefits behind bars and is once again drawn into the lifestyle. This brief scenario illustrates clearly the importance of developing a "two-pronged" approach to the issue of Aboriginal gangs – one for inmates, one for young people on the street. To be effective both must deal with the structural issues as outlined, which invariably lead to gang involvement in both locales. We turn now to a review of prevention and intervention strategies, past and present, in the Edmonton area in dealing with both street and prison gangs.

Prevention and Intervention Strategies for Gangs

Gordon (2000) suggests that knowing the "type" of group we are dealing with provides insight into the kinds of policies and programming that may work best in dealing with the group. As he points out, a criminal organization requires a different strategy than a street gang or group of "wanna-bes" (2000: 56). Street gangs and "wanna-bes" tend to appear and disappear in waves, whereas criminal organizations are more constant, more organized, and more likely to involve older members. Based on our research, we concur. We suggest that the various causal factors we've identified as relevant in the case of Aboriginal street gangs and "wanna-be" groups should inform the policy and programming initiatives used in dealing with them. There are two unique opportunities when programming in this area can be effective. First, there are

preventative programs, which focus on youth-at-risk, dealing with issues that are the pre-cursors to gang involvement. Second, intervention programming for individuals already committed to a criminal/gang lifestyle, usually these individuals are already convicted of an offence and already serving time. The programs deal with the same problem, only at different stages in the process.

In the case of "wanna-be" groups, which in our view signifies the possible early stages of street gang formation, policies and programming that directly target the structural issues mentioned earlier would be most appropriate. In the case of all youth, and particularly Aboriginal youth, this means developing initiatives that build and strengthen the community. Community conditions, environments and relationships that provide support and guidance for young people are required. In terms of the theoretical discussion earlier, we need quite simply to create bonds between youth and pro-social, non-criminogenic society and we must build and sustain an organized, as opposed to disorganized, social environment. Pro-social role models, strong links to schools, employment opportunities, recreational programs and facilities that promote social bonding are all critical to gang prevention. Education about the perils of gang life is also of utmost importance. As Gordon suggests, "anti-gang programming appears to be most effective when it is aimed at the supply of new gang and group members….programs in high schools can reduce fear and intimidation, dry up the source of gang personnel, and help generate a broader, negative perspective of gang membership, especially amongst younger adolescents. A great deal is accomplished once gang membership is defined as "uncool" by the adolescent sub-culture" (2005: 57).

Targeting street gang members is more difficult, but still possible. Street gang members who have already been exposed to the "benefits" of street gang life may need more coaxing to leave. We suggest that in dealing with these individuals, ex-gang member mentors are an effective method of intervention. Ex-members are "real life examples" of the good that can come from leaving the gang. The message coming from others who have lived the life and "been there" seems to resonate with current street gang members. Ex-gang members also have a role to play in the prevention programming discussed earlier, they can help prevent young people from joining a "wanna-be" clique or gang as well as assist "wanna-bes" and street gang members in their disengagement from the gang.

Behind bars, prison programming should also focus on prevention and intervention. Preventing prisoners from turning to gangs means dealing with issues of protection and the desire for money (employment) behind bars. It also means reducing the premature labelling of "all" Aboriginal inmates as (real or probable) gang members (Mercredi, 2000). Long-term offender programs like the one described below help with intervention by encouraging inmates to face the precursors (issues relating to family, substance abuse, and violence) to their involvement. The interconnections that exist between street and prison gangs suggest that gang intervention in prison is a promising means of reducing gang activities both inside and outside prison walls. Prisons are a source of recruitment so it follows that intervening in prison gangs could lead to a reduction of members on the street after release.

Street Gang Involvement: Intervention and Prevention

"Derek" walks into a gymnasium filled with young teens, ranging between the ages of 12 and 17. He is wearing a shiny powder blue tracksuit with lots of "bling" dangling around his neck. As Derek saunters in the gymnasium falls silent – his presence, his confidence, the air about him stops students in mid conversation. Everyone stares at the "gangsta" before them. After a brief introduction, Derek then asks the group to throw their shoes into the centre of the gym. It's an exercise, something fun to start things off. The teens giggle, jostle each other, tease, laugh, but all throw their shoes into the centre of the ring. Then Derek asks for their jackets, just another component to the exercise, and another part of the fun. So they do it.

"Rob" walks in from the back door to the gymnasium. Nodding and smiling he looks at the crowd of eager, young onlookers. Suddenly his smile disappears. As he slowly nods, intensely takes stock of the group, peers at them through eyes half closed, chin jutting out, he says matter-of-factly: "We just punked you out." The atmosphere changes as the audience shifts uncomfortably in their seats, giggles turning to nervous laughter, not sure of what will come next.

And so begins Rob and Derek's "Gang Prevention and Intervention" session. Both ex-gang members, the two have spent the past several years speaking to youth about the perils of life in a gang. Rob, involved in this type of work for the past nine years is an old hand at the process.

Derek, on the other hand is a newcomer. Here is Derek's story: Derek and his younger brother were raised by their mother who struggled with alcohol. Derek, who never knew his father, grew up in an environment where addiction and alcohol abuse were the norm; violence and physical abuse were the tools used to handle disagreements and anger. In elementary school, Derek felt like an outsider. He felt shame that his mother was on welfare, that his clothes came from thrift stores, and that he didn't know his father. His shame and isolation grew and he adopted a 'tough guy' demeanour. He was suspended from school several times, and by 13, started skipping school before he dropped out. He was labelled a troublemaker, dismissed as a boy unlikely to succeed. Derek took to the streets, and soon found a group of youngsters who lived parallel lives. Together, they started using drugs and alcohol, and soon, were being courted by gang members. Gang membership gave Derek, for perhaps the first time in his life, an identity he felt he'd never had. He quickly rose through the ranks to a position of 'power'; he worked as a dial-a-doper for the gang, selling crack. He made a lot of money—for his gang member mentor—but Derek was still living in poverty with his mother or crashing in flophouses with other gang members. Then came the disillusionment. Derek was stabbed on more than one occasion, once coming close to death. He went to jail, and the hollow promises of his fellow gang members to always stand by him, left him alone again. When Derek was in trouble, they were nowhere to be found. Derek finally realized he had to get out of the gang, and fortunately came in contact with a number of people who reinforced the wisdom of his decision. He was accepted into a pre-employment program. There, an admired instructor assured Derek he was 'smart and capable'. He was given the opportunity to succeed and took it. When the instructor told Derek 'what you put into the program is what you'll get out of it', the words were an epiphany for the young man. He suddenly realized the hard work and loyalty he'd devoted to the gang would be better applied to addressing his own life. Derek contacted Rob Papin, himself a former gang member, who had helped other young people extricate themselves from gangs. Rob supported and mentored Derek, introduced him to Elders to help him gain a sense of his identify as an Aboriginal person, and to think about his future in positive terms. Derek saw the possibilities, not only for himself but his four-year-old daughter. Today, two years after leaving the gang, Derek is working with Rob, they work together as a team. They were Associate Producers of Gang Aftermath, a documentary about street gangs from an Aboriginal perspective. The duo also works together on a Gang Prevention and Intervention Program for

Native Counselling Services of Alberta. Like Rob before him, Derek dedicates much of his time to sharing his history with young people, to help them avoid a path that leads to gangs, imprisonment and often premature, violent death. At last, Derek has found the true meaning of friendship, belonging and power (retrieved from www. csgv.ca May 2, 2006).

The Gang Prevention/Intervention program was established in November 2005 and operates under two primary principles. The first principle is that every individual has infinite worth and dignity and the second is that every individual has the ability to make a positive contribution to their own well being as well as to the community. These principles translate into a comprehensive approach that focuses on education, prevention and intervention put into action through the Gang Prevention and Intervention Handbook, Gang Awareness and Prevention Presentations, and Intervention services.

The Gang Prevention and Intervention staff completed "In Search of Your Warrior" in January 2006. This program, delivered through Native Counselling Services of Alberta (NCSA), is designed to provide indigenous people with insight into the evolution of violence through an intensive three-week workshop. Since completion of this program, Gang Prevention and Intervention staff has been:

- Working with the incarcerated young offenders in the form of mentoring and resource sharing with youth;
- In consultation with the Paul First Nation regarding the formation of a pilot project modeled after Gang Prevention and Intervention within their community;
- Involved in discussions with Edmonton Police Service regarding presentations;
- Involved in establishing a relationship with Community Solutions to Gang Violence (CSGV) (discussed below). This has included posting success stories on the website as well as providing unique insight into the initiative's goals; and
- Involved in mentorship within the community. This is accomplished through first establishing trust with the youth and then moving to eradicate self-destructive behaviour.

There are two kinds of clients that Gang Prevention and Intervention deal with: on-going clients and one-off service clients. On-going clients are in the program for an extended period of

time. Staff members are on-call to provide non-therapeutic counselling, work with parole officers to develop care plans, and participate in cultural and traditional activities with the clients. One-off clients are those who seek immediate services such as a food bank referral. These are clients who are not committed to change, including clients who are unwilling to cut ties with the gang or who do not have legitimate associations. These individuals are encouraged to return when they have made a clear decision to leave the gang. In order to make the distinction, the process of accepting a client begins with obtaining information relating to their gang affiliation. The questions asked include:

- Who brought them into the gang?
- Tattoos on body, are they willing to cover them?
- Identify names of higher-ranking members of that particular gang?
- Are they in any debt (drugs or money)?
- What their role is in that gang (muscleman, dial-a-doping, errand boys, etc).
- Explanation of home-life (growing up, as well as at present).

The next step for providing service to on-going clients is to seek further information from them to gage their readiness to take the necessary steps to change their lives. This is accomplished through the following questions:

- What are they willing to do in order to get out, and remain out of the gang? (i.e. relocation if necessary)
- Are they willing/ready to access treatment, education, employment, and housing resources in the community?
- If they are parents and the child/children have been apprehended, are they willing/ready to take steps to get them back. (i.e. make contact with Child and Family Services, start visitations, etc)

The Gang Prevention and Intervention staff has been developing resources to further help raise community awareness about the impact of gangs. In addition to attending the National Youth Roundtable on Mentorship programs involving Aboriginal Youth in Conflict with the law on March 6, 2006 in Gatineau, Quebec, the staff members have completed a handbook to

accompany "Gang Aftermath", the documentary released by BearPaw Media in November, 2005. This handbook will be a stand-alone resource for parents, police, social workers, teachers and others interested in learning about Aboriginal street gangs or who work with at-risk youth. The handbook will be completed by March 2007. As well, a poster is being distributed that depicts gangs and the gang life as a "dead end" by correcting long-held gang myths.

The final technique used by the Gang Prevention and Intervention team is workshops, as described earlier, where members of the staff use various methods to teach youth and those who work with them the realities of gangs. Workshops have been held for various professional groups, including nurses, educators, and First Nations groups. In addition, numerous presentations to junior and senior high schools students and university classes have been and continue to be delivered by staff.

In an effort to broaden the appeal of the message, staff created program participant evaluation forms for both youth and community workshops in order to obtain feedback about the content of the presentations. Also, a shorter version of "Gang Aftermath" was created called "Illusions" that is more appropriate for younger ages.

Street Gang Involvement: Prevention

The Community Solution to Gang Violence (CSGV) is an initiative comprised of a diverse group of private citizens, community organizations and all levels of government, working collaboratively on a strategic, community-wide approach to gang violence. The objectives of the initiative are to:

- Enhance a sense of community responsibility and commitment to address gang violence;
- Promote positive youth development and develop conditions to prevent young people from becoming involved in gangs; and
- Create a community-wide plan and network of support to find solutions to gang violence.

The project participants and organizers subscribe to the notion that while the police and the justice system play a major role in the enforcement and suppression of gang violence, it is the community that is best positioned to address the underlying causes of gang violence and

mobilize people to take measures to prevent young people from being drawn into gangs. The initiative has grown and now includes close to 100 individuals representing over forty community agencies.

This initiative is comprised of a Steering Committee, a Project Manager who oversees, organizes and directs all activities of the project, an Evaluation Team whose mandate is to track the changes effected by the initiative, and five working groups which each meet individually. Working on specific goals, the CSGV has been expanding and evolving since its inception in 2003. Each working group focuses on goals specific to its domain, striving to increase awareness, policies and programs that directly affect at risk youth and their families and help in the prevention of gang involvement. For example, the Government and Policy Group has as its mandate infrastructure, research and policy impacting the prevention and intervention of gang violence and the promotion of positive youth development. The group is bringing organizations and government together to develop policies, programs and services for the prevention, intervention and suppression of gang violence. The Community Awareness Group works to provide information to increase the community's understanding of gangs and gang activity. Information about the dynamics, conditions and realities of gangs drawn from other working groups, law enforcement officials, field workers, and government is integrated and then provided to citizens in the Greater Edmonton Area so the community can engage in action. The Early Intervention Group actively promotes and supports positive family communication and healthy family development with the ultimate goal of preventing children from being drawn into gangs. The Youth Group provides support for youth to avoid the drug/gang lifestyle and opportunities for positive engagement in the environments surrounding young people (school, club organizations, community, work settings). This group is building relationships with youth people and youth service organizations to create a network of support around young people.

Currently, the working groups are creating a strategy to reduce risk factors among youth. There is considerable evidence that the most effective approach for preventing young people from becoming involved with gangs is to reduce risk factors associated with risk-taking behaviours and increase the protective factors around young people that promote positive, healthy development. Risk factors are the conditions in the individual and their social environment that predict an increased likelihood of engaging in risk-taking behaviours such as

gang involvement while protective factors are conditions that buffer or moderate the effects of risks or increase resistance to them.

In an attempt to reflect the realities the community faces in addressing gang violence, a number of case scenarios were developed to show the complexities surrounding the lives of young people who may become vulnerable to gang involvement. These case scenarios have been developed by weaving the knowledge and experience of service providers together to paint a picture of the "gang situation" and bring it down to a human level. They are not case studies of actual persons but composite profiles of situations of risk surrounding vulnerable young people. The case scenarios reflect the lives of young people from a variety of backgrounds including Caucasian, immigrant, refugee, Aboriginal, male and female. The common thread running through these situations of risk are limited protective factors (supportive adults and social environments) surrounding young people. They do not experience support from adults, build relationships across generations, hear consistent messages about boundaries and values nor are they given positive and constructive roles. As a result, they become marginalized and isolated within our society. As discussed earlier, this marginalization and isolation is particularly acute among Aboriginal, refugee and immigrant youth who face larger structural and cultural barriers that hamper their ability to obtain the support they need to engage in healthy, positive behaviours. All too often these young people become engaged in risky behaviours. Gangs become a way to obtain a sense of connection, a way to meet their needs and to gain a sense of power over their lives. In short, gangs and the gang lifestyle become their social environment - their place of work, their family, and their community.

Drawing on this evidence, the CSGV uses a risk-protective framework, using the case scenarios to frame discussions in the working groups. The groups work to create policies and programs that facilitate positive action to reduce risk factors and increase protective factors by building positive relationships and patterns of interactions with young people. They do this by creating positive social environments surrounding young people (community, family, service organizations), and promoting social and economic policies that support positive youth development. The underlying philosophy is that everyone - young people, families, neighbours, service providers, funding organizations and government - can build up the assets and protective factors surrounding young people.

The general strategy of the CSGV initiative is to use this risk and protective framework to raise awareness of the conditions that draw young people into gangs and the protective factors that are needed to create opportunities to promote the positive development of young people, which will enable them to avoid the gang lifestyle. The real challenge in this approach is to shift thinking from looking for quick fixes to one that addresses the deeper causes of gang violence and the needs of children, youth and families. The goal is to rebuild the developmental infrastructure around children and young people and shift the way we think about and respond to issues affecting the lives of children and young people. These shifts require dramatic and wide spread changes that will take a sustained vision, long-term commitment, and collaborative effort by the community. As such the CSGV is not so much a project as a movement that acts on the notion that it takes a community to raise a child.

Both programs, Gang Prevention and Intervention and the Community Solution to Gang Violence are examples of the type of innovative programming created in Alberta to deal with gangs. Mellor and his colleagues identify, describe and categorize 77 specific Canadian anti-gang programs in their 2005 report. Without getting into detailed descriptions of the programs, the overview of Canadian programming indicates that the programs are largely community-based, involving many partners, including police, outreach workers, community health professionals, former gang members and various others (Mellor et al, 2005: 84). This approach to programming, directly based in community mobilization, is supported by a growing body of literature, as the Mellor report points out, but also by the realistic recognition that gangs are a social issue with roots in community-based processes. Communities therefore are in the best position to take ownership of the gang problem, identify possible sources of the problem, develop services and programming to educate youth and other community members, address risk factors that make youth vulnerable to this lifestyle, and to effectively deal with the issue (Mellor et al, 2005).

Interestingly, the Mellor report indicates that almost 60 percent of the programs in Canada are located in Quebec, with Ontario being home to only five percent. Each of the Western provinces (British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba) had approximately 7 to 10 percent of the programs identified, totalling about 36 percent. It appears then that while steps are being taken nationally to deal with gangs, programming in general is lacking. Programs such as

Gang Prevention and Intervention and the Community Solution to Gang Violence are beneficial both in terms of the impact they have on the lives of young people and they can also serve as prototypes for the development and evolution of gang programming which is sure to continue and grow.

Management /Treatment of Gangs In Prisons

Across the city from where Rob and Derek are speaking to the group of young people, a psychologist walks into a room filled with eight long-term offenders, most of whom have gang affiliations, and are currently serving time in this maximum security federal correctional facility. Group members have just completed a family tree and are sharing the information with each other. They are getting to know each other by talking about family. The psychologist probes each offender about his past, his upbringing and his childhood. One inmate relays his story. His mother was a prostitute who would lock him up in a closet sometimes for days at a time, with little or no food, while she was out turning tricks and partying. After the individual finishes telling his story, the psychologist makes the following statement: "Your mom wasn't a very good parent".

"What the f**k did you say?"

The psychologist matter-of-factly repeats his comment: "I said your mom wasn't a very good parent".

"Well, f**k you", the inmate says as he stands up angrily, lifting and turning over the table he is sitting behind in the process.

As the other seven inmates push their chairs back, arms crossed, the psychologist calmly states: "Look if you want me to lie to you and tell you your childhood was wonderful, your mom was a great parent, I can do that. But that would be a lie and we are here to talk about the truth. It's up to you. Do you want the truth or a bunch of lies?"

As the inmate reluctantly sits back down again, he mumbles "well, the truth I guess".

The psychologist, trembling inside, calmly tells the group, "time for a coffee break". And so begins another session of "Group".

"Group" refers to a program offered to long-term, often gang affiliated, offenders within a maximum security correctional facility. The program uses two components, group therapy sessions and individual counselling. These components are used to educate offenders on causal factors that contribute to their criminal, and often, violent behaviour. Through education and counselling the program facilitators aim to help offenders deal constructively with some of the causal factors linked to gang involvement identified earlier in this report. The program is part of a broader approach to offender treatment we term "Healing Through Dynamic Intervention" which we discuss in more detail later in this report.

The current state of "gang affairs" makes innovative approaches to the treatment of offenders and gang members behind bars necessary. The fact is that the positive impact of efforts to intervene in street gang activities and to strive to prevent youth from joining are compromised when similar efforts are not simultaneously conducted behind bars. Gangs within Canadian correctional institutions appear to be proliferating in terms of recruitment/numbers, violence, and their connections with street gangs (Jones et al., 2004; Mellor et al, 2005; Mercredi, 2000). Because the two branches of gangs appear inextricably linked, a two-pronged attack must be launched in order to truly effect change. The prison gang phenomenon, though sharing much with its street variation, lays claim to unique processes and issues that must be addressed before change can occur. For example, efforts to effectively deal with institutional gangs have been thwarted by widespread belief in, and perpetuation of, several myths. These myths, which are part of the correctional culture, contribute to the "mystery" and misinformation surrounding the topic. By "demystifying" and dispelling some of these myths, we can better equip correctional personnel for their daily work and interactions with offenders.

Many of these myths are directly related to the entrenched correctional officer subculture that exists. This subculture is not specific to Canada and has existed for decades. Based on the belief that "the keepers" and "the kept" are diametrically opposed because of the nature of their relationship, the subculture focuses on an "us" versus "them" dichotomy that serves to divide and place barriers between officers and inmates. Effectively dealing with gang members, and all

inmates, means counteracting the negative aspects of the correctional officer subculture. In the case of Aboriginal offenders it also means dispelling some of the myths regarding Aboriginal gangs. Finally, it means introducing programming, policies and procedures that address some of the weaknesses and problems within the system as it currently operates. Drawing on the information gathered from our interviews, we first discuss some of the myths surrounding prison staff and inmates, followed by a brief discussion of the learning process the correctional system is experiencing when it comes to dealing with gangs. We conclude with some positive suggestions for change, based on the experiences within one maximum security institution.

Myths Surrounding Correctional Officers

*1. **COs have to be tough and hard-line to do their job.*** While correctional officers who fit this description exist and have worked in the field for years using this approach, it is not necessary to embody these characteristics to effectively deal with inmates. This myth is informed by the belief that we can "force" or coerce people into respecting us. In fact, a significant number of respondents from the correctional services interviews indicate that the best way to deal with inmates is to "treat them like human beings", "to treat them like I would want to be treated". As one individual stated, "every interaction you have with an inmate is therapeutic (whether good or bad therapy)". The goal should be to make interactions positive; coercion works against trust and respect.

*2. **Things are "black" and "white.*** Thing are never "black and white", they are usually gray. By talking with and listening to inmates it becomes amply clear that things are never as clear-cut as they seem. There is a story behind every story. By getting the "whole story", staff can make the move toward better understanding the individual involved.

*3. **People can't change.*** In order for people to make a change in their lives, they need to be willing and committed to making that change. Some inmates are immediately ready to change, others become ready to change through the course of their incarceration and yet others never do. Correctional staff can be a part of this process, by creating environments that assist offenders in moving forward.

*4. **Segregation is an effective way of managing gangs.*** A minority of respondents expressed attitudes supportive of this myth. These individuals suggest that the best approach for dealing with institutional gangs is to emphasize security concerns, restrict movement of inmates, and eliminate gang symbols from the institution. Support for this approach exists in the American literature. As Toller and Tsagaris argue "the strategic challenge to corrections is to upset the gang's internal organization" (1996: 110) so that it cannot supply its members or potential recruits with any benefits.

The Correctional Service of Canada's experience with segregation proves that this approach actually builds animosity between rival gangs and between individual inmates. Escalating animosity within an institution makes the daily work of correctional officers much more difficult. Inmate movement and the coordination of that movement become increasingly complex and tricky feats.

*5. **Transferring leaders is an effective way of managing gangs.*** The belief informing this myth is that transfer of leaders results in a temporary disruption of the gang organization and possibly its activities. The fact is that disruption is temporary. Gangs have learned to adapt quickly to this type of interference in their business and organization.

Transfer of gang leaders to other institutions is actually counteractive to effective gang control. Several officers indicate that the transfer of gang leaders to other institutions is an effective way of contributing to the proliferation of gangs. They liken the transfer of gang members to various institutions across the country to the spread of a disease. By transferring a gang leader to a different institution, one where perhaps the particular gang presence is minimal or nonexistent and introducing the gang element to the prison population is like planting a seed. Recruitment and the development of a strong gang presence may ensue.

These individuals argue that containing gang activity might be more effective. At the very least, correctional administrators will not contribute to the spread and development of gangs in possibly "untouched" institutions. In addition to the benefits for institutional control, there are implications for the presence of street gangs in the affected communities. Once released, the initially transferred "newcomer" gang member may be in a position to introduce a new gang to

the community in which the institution is located. In other words, the transfer of inmate gang members has implications for the spread of regionally based gangs to different regions of the country.

This process does not apply only to Aboriginal gangs. For example, Asian gangs from Eastern Canada, whose institutional gang members are transferred to the West, are in a good position to initiate 'business' and form new street connections once released. Observers report that CSC has essentially, albeit unintentionally, contributed to the spread of regional gangs to previously untouched areas of the country by implementing this policy.

Myths Surrounding Aboriginal Institutional Gangs

*1. **Aboriginal gangs are composed of Aboriginal inmates.*** Aboriginal gangs are primarily homogeneous. However, they accept membership from all ethnic groups.

*2. **Gang structure is static***. Gang structure is dynamic. Chains of command and organizational structures vary between gangs. Different structures exist in different gangs. Often the structure a gang takes is determined by the availability of leaders, affiliates, patched members, "wanna-bes" and recruits within a particular institution.

*3. **Gang leadership is highly predictable.*** Gang leadership may be based on age or seniority. There are however, examples of younger members who are leaders and many examples of older members who remain lower in the gang echelons. Institutional gang leadership is strongly influenced by availability. Members have to choose from individuals who are available in the institution.

*4. **Aboriginal gangs are similar in function and form.*** Every gang does business differently. Every gang has a different reputation for doing business and a different way of dealing with member infractions of gang rules.

These myths have significantly influenced the methods utilized in Canadian corrections for dealing with institutional gangs. We have identified three stages in this process.

Historical Progressive Stages in Dealing with Institutional Gangs

1. **Denial.** Initially, people were hesitant to admit that institutional gangs existed. We learned the hard way that denial facilitates both recruitment and the proliferation of gangs. By trying to avoid the problem, hoping that it would somehow disappear on its own, we inadvertently contributed to the escalation of the problem. In the absence of any organized response to the problem on the part of officials, gang members recruited vigorously, developed reputations, expanded business and became established fixtures in the institutional landscape. Gang members were transferred to different institutions. Groups were split up. The result was the spread of gangs, since newly transferred gang members were often sent to "new, unexplored, untouched territory" which allowed them the opportunity to recruit and expand their operations.

2. **Separation and Segregation.** The next stage in the process is the segregation of known gang members. Gang members are isolated in units of their own and kept separate from other rival gangs. There are several problems with this approach. First and foremost, it is an attempt at "accommodation" to the gang phenomena and does not directly deal with the root causes of the problem. When we segregate gangs, we are essentially throwing our hands up in despair and saying that the only way we can control the situation is by trying to "manage" them by monitoring their movement and activities and making sure they do not interact with other gangs. This approach puts an onerous strain on correctional officers who have to be vigilant in keeping track of which group members are where at what time. Secondly, this approach leads to increased tensions within institutions as gang members, encouraged in their agitation and animosity through segregation, search for opportunities to threaten and intimidate rival gang members (through glass windows, doors, across open areas).

3. **Healing Through Dynamic Intervention.** A third, innovative approach for addressing gang-related issues, in its early developmental stages, is offered as an alternative not only for managing gangs effectively, but also for addressing the root causes of gang involvement. This approach offers an option very different from the previous two methods. The Dynamic Intervention approach, already in use in one Canadian maximum security institution, has resulted in a relatively peaceful existence between rival Aboriginal gangs. When a peaceful existence is established it is then possible to employ programming to effectively address the underlying, core

causes of the problems that lead to gang involvement in the first place. We turn now to a brief discussion of this philosophy and approach to dealing with gang members behind bars.

A Case Study in Healing and Dynamic Intervention

One maximum security institution is currently using this innovative approach for working with gang-involved inmates. This approach deals directly with the core causes of prison gang involvement discussed above and confronts the myths surrounding prison populations head on. Faced with increasing tension and violence within the institution, it was imperative that "something be done" about the Aboriginal gang problem. There were several stages to the process, which eventually led to the establishment of a "truce" or "peace treaty" among Aboriginal gangs and the General Population of inmates in this institution.

Individuals actively involved in the "experiment" indicate that the first stage of the process involved individual officers working toward the creation of an atmosphere where a truce could eventually be possible. These officers focus on "dealing with the little things first". Part of dealing with the little things means working with individuals as individuals. It means looking past the label gang member to the person behind the façade. It means showing individuals respect and being honest and fair. It means talking with and perhaps more importantly, listening to individuals. As one of our respondents indicates, dealing with gang members means focusing on the member first and the gang second. Establishing rapport with individuals creates a positive atmosphere and can lead to an environment where a truce among rival groups becomes a reality.

Prior to the current state of affairs, the institution was plagued with the complexity and need for extensive coordination in order to manage seven different populations who were segregated. Many officers and inmates alike were ready for a change. It had become unrealistic and problematic for the institution to continue with its policy of segregation, separation and intensive movement control of the rival groups in the institution.

As mentioned previously, through small, individual, positive interactions, officers were able to unwittingly set the stage for a revolutionary occurrence. Inmates initiated a peace treaty to end the state of segregation. One of their goals was to ease some of the restrictions on their movement and activities within the institution. In other words, they were willing to give

something up (overt gang confrontation) to get something in return (increased movement, more recreation, family visits).

The officers explain that the next stages of the peace process involved a series of calculated risks. The first meeting involved four leaders of one gang, the Warriors, and four leaders of another gang, the Redd Alert. A tense meeting for inmates and officers alike, the end result was an agreement to meet again to further discuss the possibility of a truce.

The next series of meetings involved a calculated "mixing" of the various inmate group representatives. Representatives from the general population met with leaders from the Warriors and then met with leaders from the Redd Alert. The mixing and discussing ensured that all groups, through their representatives had a say in the process. The bottom line is that they (the inmates) came up with what they needed to have the institution open. A series of calculated risks facilitated the process. The end result was a truce, essentially created by inmates themselves, facilitated by correctional personnel, the guidelines of which were established by the inmate representatives.

The officers stress the importance of guidelines to ensure the stability of the peace treaty. This institution previously had attempted to integrate the Redd Alert and Indian Posse but the process broke down because guidelines for interactions were not put in place. Today, in this institution, when a new inmate arrives, representatives from the various inmate groups meet with the newcomer individually and explain the nature of the truce and the guidelines for behaviour.

Currently, units contain a mix of inmates. Gangs can reside in separate units, mixed with other inmate groups (i.e. general population inmates). However, all inmates have the opportunity to interact. For example, all inmates work, eat, and participate in recreation together.

Officers involved in this process indicate that it appears to be working well. The truce has resulted in an atmosphere where correctional personnel can now focus on the types of programming that get to the root of the issues and problems that many inmates have. Communication skills development, interpersonal skills development, and employment skill development are the types of programs that inmates (who are interested and ready) and staff can

realistically focus on in a less restricted prison environment. Currently at this particular institution, the focus is on working individually with inmates, in group settings through programming. As the officers involved stated "The work is happening now".

An atmosphere conducive to real change in individuals has been created through the truce process. Therapeutic intervention programming targets the deficient skill base of individual inmates. In many cases program facilitators are imparting parenting values to individual inmates who may never have been "parented properly". As one facilitator states:

> "It all comes down to three things and this is what we stress with individual inmates: respect other people; try not to hurt anyone; and do the right thing."

Ultimately by treating inmates like human beings, by embodying these three things in their own interactions with inmates, individual officers can teach through example. Dynamic Intervention has the potential to change people's lives in a positive way.

The officers directly involved in this peace process reveal that the challenge for them now on a daily basis is "population management" as opposed to gang management or control. They must constantly manage the issues that emerge. This requires diligence and vigilance by focusing on those "little things" that can quickly escalate into much bigger issues, issues that could realistically threaten the current peaceful state of affairs. These officers are fully aware of the precarious nature of the situation they have helped create. But the truce appears to be working and success stories, few and far between in corrections, are worth listening to.

In summary, there are three aspects to Healing Through Dynamic Intervention:

1. **The dynamic approach begins with the assumption that correctional personnel need to learn about the people they are working with.** In any other helper/helped professional relationship, the helper must be familiar with the people they are looking after. If he/she is to perform the best work possible, the doctor must learn about the patient, the teacher about the student, the counsellor about the client. To shut down communication and the sharing of information is to sabotage the interaction. Certainly, the relationship between correctional officer and inmate is different in many ways, but in many ways it is the same. Respondents indicate that if the concern of "corrections" is the "correcting" of people, then at the most basic

level, practitioners must first become familiar with their wards. This means listening to inmates, asking questions when appropriate, showing concern and interest.

2. **Treat inmates like human beings.** Honesty. Respect. Trust. The dynamic intervention approach stresses these prerequisites for positive interactions between inmates and staff. Dynamic Intervention is predicated on the notion that safety within the institution and positive changes in both the atmosphere of the institution, and in the lives of inmates is directly related to the manner in which individuals interact. Increase positive interactions, reduce/eliminate negative ones.

3. **Deal with individual issues and issues of individuals**. By focussing on the "member" in "gang member" correctional personnel can deal with precursors to conflict situations. This requires problem solving on the part of officers. Listening to inmates, paying attention to what's going on around them, and dealing with the little things is the way to prevent larger issues from developing. For some officers, this means acting as an advocate for inmates at times. It means "doing what's right because it's right and not buckling in to peer pressure". It means standing by your word. As two officers state "Honesty is very important. The approach we use with inmates is as follows: We'll tell you the truth as we know it. If we don't know, we won't tell you." This very basic guideline for officer/inmate interaction illustrates both honesty and advocacy. The end result of both inevitably is respect.

4. **Create an atmosphere where inmates suggest peace treaties and take ownership of the problem.** Dealing with the little issues in a positive way can also set the stage for a peace treaty of the type described above.

5. **Officers, in collaboration with inmates must establish guidelines to maintain the integration.** Inmates come up with rules. They decide what they are willing to compromise, what they are willing to give up, and what they hope to "get" in return.

6. **Recognize and acknowledge small steps, small changes, small victories.** Implementing the Dynamic Intervention approach means recognizing that this is a process. It is not an "all or none" approach. Dynamic Intervention recognizes that "the road to recovery is fraught with relapse". One can liken the process to any other healing journey, whether it is

quitting smoking or dealing with any of life's challenges. Individuals dealing with issues often experience setbacks but this does not prohibit eventual success. In practical terms, this means that every success, however small, must be recognized, celebrated and encouraged. Positive feedback is integral to any developmental process. Dynamic Intervention is about perseverance and not giving up – on the part of inmates who embrace it and staff who facilitate it.

7. **COs have to "cross the floor first".** Correctional officers, by the nature of their position in relation to inmates, have "power" in the situation. This means they have the power to make the first move toward dynamic intervention and toward positive interactions.

8. **Similar processes must occur in the community with street gangs.** Though outside the direct jurisdiction of correctional personnel and administrators, Dynamic Intervention could also be applied in the community with at-risk youth in an effort to prevent gang involvement in the first place.

9. **Groups who specialize in dealing with small problems.** In order to deal with the small issues it is helpful to have a group of people who work on the day-to-day interactions that could escalate into bigger problems. These staff members, specially trained to deal with such conflicts, would manage conflicts as they arise - before they become larger gang issues.

Additional Components to the Intervention Process

1. **Education and Training for Staff.** Already equipped with hours of conflict resolution and communication skills training, officers should be encouraged to use many of the skills they already possess. Honesty, respect, "getting to know" their wards, listening to what inmates say, acting consistently, and being fair, just some of the characteristics and skills necessary for Dynamic Intervention to succeed, are within the purview of most if not all correctional personnel. Using these skills and traits may require practice for some, for others it comes more easily. A significant number already use this type of approach in their daily interactions with inmates. For many correctional personnel, consciously enacting the dictates of Dynamic Intervention will require little or no effort. For those who require such training, courses should be offered.

Providing and reinforcing such skills will contribute to an environment that is less conductive to misunderstandings, tension and violence. When officers have the skills to diffuse potentially volatile situations, gang activities can be reduced. By providing gang members, and inmates in general, with non-violent options, the need for conflict is eliminated. Communicating with inmates and offering new perspectives on old issues can contribute to a less tense atmosphere.

Staff should also be aware that not every altercation or incident involving a known or suspected gang member is directly related to the gang. Similarly, not all "troublemakers" are gang members.

> "By identifying (inaccurately) and labelling individuals as 'gang involved', the result has often been a self-fulfilling prophecy. WE have created some gang members ourselves".

When an inmate is misidentified as a gang member, the inmate is left with no other option but to "step up to the plate". Inaccurate labelling can result in the creation of gang members who are pressured into misbehaviour they may not otherwise have engaged in.

One way of combating this tendency to inaccurately label inmates and assume gang membership is to deal with inmates on an individual basis. Officers must stay focused on the individual as an individual rather than a gang member. In other words, officers must be educated on the necessity of not assuming that every incident that occurs in prison is gang-related. By making these kinds of assumptions, staff and other inmates actually feed into the gang agenda by contributing to the escalation of the gang's reputation.

Several respondents estimate that the majority of institutional incidents are the result of "individual beefs and conflict" and that a minority is truly gang-related. But the perception of staff, administrators, police, and the media inaccurately link these incidents to gang members, thus creating or constructing the gang problem as larger than it actually is. As one respondent emphatically states: "We need to deal with the individual, without sensationalizing the gang aspect".

Certainly educational resources aiding officers in the identification of gang symbols, behaviours, and incidents could eliminate some of these misperceptions, which in turn may remove some of the power of gangs. Fong and Buentello (2001) interviewed 181 high-ranking

correctional administrators in the Texas Department of Corrections, who had five or more years of experience in working with prison gangs. One recommendation that emerged from this research was that in-service training for officers, aimed at developing awareness and skills in detecting inmate activities that may lead to the formation of prison gangs, be provided to all correctional employees. This type of knowledge can facilitate officers in dealing with the little things that have the potential to escalate into bigger ones.

2. Programming for Inmates. Staff may want to target newcomers to an institution for "preventive education". As one officer states:

> "Have as much staff interaction as possible. Talking with young men when they first come in, to advise them of the consequence of joining gangs."

One of the themes that emerged from the interviews with correctional personnel is the need to attack the core issues which have contributed to gang involvement among Aboriginal and other offenders. Addressing the vast array of suspected causes, many of which are rooted in childhood experiences, and others which are grounded in the nature of the prison structure itself, is a daunting task, one that requires addressing many aspects in an individual's personality, coping skills, childhood, and belief system.

In terms of formal programming, inmates can benefit from conflict resolution programs. Learning to deal effectively with tense situations, learning to explore more effective, less violent solutions is a valuable tool for inmates in these types of situations. Many inmates lack effective communication skills, so any type of communication skills training has the potential to improve interactions among inmates and staff. Anger management and conflict resolution programs can "give inmates the skills and the resources to handle their own anger and that of other inmates more appropriately and in a non-violent manner. One of the main objectives of the course is teaching respect for one's self and others" (Love, 1994: 144-147). Programs that teach inmates the values, beliefs and attitudes conducive to self-respect and respect for others can be beneficial. It would be a worthwhile venture for inmates to participate in courses that teach values clarification, listening skills, problem solving, mediation skills and aspects of victim/offender reconciliation.

"Some of our projects are really good. They deal with cognitive profiles of offenders and target the underlying issues - for example the hurt and anger many of these offenders experience. They have to deal with the emotional issues that got them into the gang - this will help them get out."

Encouraging participation in programs that deal with issues like lack of self-esteem, lack of employment skills, relationship problems, lack of interpersonal skills, and poor communication skills will partly rely on the ability of individual officers to "get through" to offenders in their daily interactions. Many gang members feel they have no alternatives to gang involvement because they have no skills. Employment, work skills, life skills programs and other similar programs are a necessary requirement for the rehabilitation process. Providing inmates with opportunities to develop the skills and confidence necessary to find legitimate work on the outside can facilitate true rehabilitation. When we provide inmates with such opportunities, we effectively address some of the core causes of gang involvement (source of money, confidence).

In other words, correctional programming, to effectively aid in the rehabilitation of gang members and general population inmates should show offenders that they have choices other than being in a gang. Some researchers point to the importance of meaningful education and work programs for inmates. By providing pro-social alternatives to the lucrative criminal lifestyle inmates perceive gangs to be, correctional institutions may curb the functional appeal of prison gangs. One expert recommends, "prisons implement anger management programs, education and encourage meaningful contact between inmates from different ethnic and racial groups" (Tischler, 1999). Work programs are also beneficial. Another expert suggests "prisons offer programs where they get people from all different races or all the different gang members and try to make mock businesses where all these guys have to work together and they get something if they achieve their goals" (Tischler, 1999).

3. Cultural/ Spirituality/Healing. Many respondents, officers and ex-gang members alike, point to spirituality and culture as possibly one of the most effective means of reaching Aboriginal gang members. Citing cases where culture has facilitated gang exit for former members, these individuals place much faith in reconnecting or, in many cases, connecting with cultural heritage. For many (but not all) Aboriginal inmates, getting in touch with Aboriginal culture and spirituality can be an integral part of the healing process. The traditional cultural

theme is a recurring one in the answers of many respondents. These individuals point to the importance of educating Aboriginal inmates on culture and spirituality, utilizing traditional healing concepts and processes in working with gang involved offenders, and finally, turning to Elders in the community to achieve these goals. As one officer indicates:

> "I don't like putting all the responsibility on Elders and Native Liaison officers, BUT I think they can connect with and talk with Aboriginal offenders at a level that COs can't."

An Elder from one institution tells a story of an Aboriginal inmate once heavily involved in gang life, who has now turned his life around:

> "This tough guy told me that during the gang part of his life he liked fighting – but it had to be FOR something. He met with an Elder, discovered spirituality and culture, and now THAT is what he is fighting for."

Some of the more frequent suggestions include "circles with Elders and head gang members", and the use of "cultural resources who are respected and strong in their values". One respondent indicated "we need Elders who can connect them to their Aboriginal roots and their heritage".

Cultural awareness and programming, perhaps more so in the case of Aboriginal offenders than any other group, has the added benefit of directly addressing some of the core issues or causes of gang behaviour. Connecting with culture and with respected Aboriginal leaders means that one of the main reasons for joining a gang – the feeling of belonging, is addressed in a more functional, positive way. The image we have of gang members is that they are individuals with problems, problems often stemming back to family and childhood. These are people who need to heal. Aboriginal culture and spirituality have the potential to directly address this need.

Along these lines one respondent indicated that when dealing with Aboriginal offenders, conflict resolution could be done traditionally. A restorative justice approach is desirable, he claims, because the process is not about saving face, or an imbalance of power (which is what much gang-related behaviour is about), rather it is about empowering everyone, giving everyone a share in the process and the peaceful outcome.

However, Aboriginal culture and spirituality may not work for everyone. Aboriginal inmates should have the option of exploring their cultural roots and heritage, and programs should be made available to them. We must not assume that reconnecting, or in some cases, connecting with culture is the answer to the problems of all Aboriginal individuals. There are individuals who can embark on a path to healing without the help of traditional cultural beliefs. The focus should be on the individual and what works best for the person. Some Aboriginal inmates may turn to Christianity or non-denominational spirituality to aid in the rehabilitative process. While culture and spirituality are not a necessary part of the Dynamic Intervention process, they can be beneficial for some inmates. What is important is positive emotional and spiritual support, whatever form it takes.

4. **Role Models.** Individuals other than correctional personnel also have a role to play in the Dynamic Intervention process. In some situations, and for some individuals, positive connections with Aboriginal Elders could provide the emotional and spiritual support required to aid in the intervention and rehabilitation process. Gang-connected inmates who are interested in healing through the development of cultural knowledge should have the opportunity to develop positive relationships with respected Elders. Educators in institutions, program facilitators, and people filling various other pro-social roles in the institution may also facilitate the intervention process. The use of ex-gang members might be a possibility as well. Ex-gang members who have established long-term, positive connections with non-criminal elements may prove valuable role models in some situations. We must be careful not to assume that because an individual has left the gang lifestyle this automatically makes him a qualified, positive mentor in the process. Similarly, the belief that one has to have "lived the life and survived" in order to facilitate rehabilitation must be discarded as inaccurate. Many individuals who have not lived the life of a gang member can effectively aid in the recovery process. In other words, we all have a role to play in dealing with the issue of gangs. In fact dealing with this problem, which is rooted in group and community based processes, is most effective when members of the community participate in a solution to the problem. Group process and group problems, require group-based solutions.

Conclusion

We set out in this research to describe briefly the definition(s) of gangs in Canada, Aboriginal experience and causal factors contributing to gang membership, links between Aboriginal street and prison gangs, and a description of strategies, prevention and intervention based, that relate to recruitment processes. Our research findings show that Aboriginal gangs in Western Canada are indeed an anomaly in terms of structure, genesis, recruitment and function. In the case of Aboriginal gangs many of the functions served by gangs exist because of the dysfunction, or absence in function, of other critical social institutions. Gangs jump in to fulfill the role of families, school, and work, institutions which have been weakened in Aboriginal communities as a result of structural inequality, discrimination, and labelling. In the case of Aboriginal peoples, whose overrepresentation in the prison system is a long established fact, prison gangs merely exacerbate and compound the street gang phenomenon. The two appear to be inextricably linked as evidenced in overlapping recruitment techniques, as well as shared leadership and criminal activities. Addressing street gang problems in the case of Aboriginal peoples cannot exist in a vacuum, separate and distinct from the prison gang problem: the two are connected because both stem from the same structural problems in society.

Following our discussion of causal factors contributing to Aboriginal gang involvement we presented three nascent prevention and/or intervention programs whose objectives include addressing the lack of bonding to conventional society, the systemic discrimination and labelling that many youth, and particularly Aboriginal youth are faced with and which lead to their gang involvement. It remains to be seen whether such programs effect change. In the meantime, attempts by the Aboriginal community and communities in general to take a stance on the issue and begin the healing process are to be commended, evaluated, replicated and further developed.

APPENDIX A: Community Solution to Gang Violence Risk Protective Framework

Fortunately, most young resist the temptations and forces that make gang life appear attractive. Researchers agree that these young people have protective factors in their lives. The most recent research in juvenile crime prevention is guided by a variation of the risk-protective factors framework, an approach that assumes the best way to prevent problems such as gang involvement is to reduce or eliminate risk factors, and increase or enhance protective factors. Protective factors are conditions that buffer or moderate the effects of risks, or increase resistance to them. Risk factors are conditions individuals experience personally and/or within their social environments that can predict an increased likelihood of engaging in risk-taking behaviour such as gang involvement.

Drawing on this evidence the Community Solution to Gang Violence (CSGV) uses a risk-protective framework with the intention of ultimately preventing youth involvement in gangs. The risk and protective factors in this document are based on a combination of research on risk factors that contribute to gang involvement, substance abuse and violence. The protective factors are based on conditions that promote positive youth development and well-being. As such, the protective factors not only help mitigate or buffer risk, but at the same time, create building blocks for healthy transitions to adulthood.

Based on existing research and community knowledge, CSGV has identified risk factors for gang involvement, and at the same time, identified protective factors to help prevent gang involvement within the individual, family, school and community. In additions we have added risk and protective factors associated with the way we organize and implement services and polices to respond to issues link gangs and gang violence.

This framework is a way to help us clarify the factors that may increase the risk of youth gang involvement, and what is needed to promote positive youth development as a means of prevention. By building positive relationships and patterns of interaction with young people, creating positive social environments, and developing social and economic policies that support

positive youth development, we can help young people resist gang involvement and work toward realizing their own potential as family members, friends, neighbours, co-workers and citizens.

Suggestions for Using the Tool

Review the Risk and Protective Factors and engage in a dialogue about how these factors play out in your experience.

- What risk and protective factors are most significant to you, your group or organization's mandate?
- What risk and protective factors are most significant to the issues your group or organization is trying to address?
- What risk and protective factors are missing?
- What protective factors do your programs and services build upon?

Individual Domain

[1] Note * indicates one of the 40 Developmental Assets for positivedevelopment identified by the Search Institute

Risk Factor	**Protective Factor/Assets**
Does not feel safe at home, school or community.	Advance a sense of **safety** at home, school, community[1]
Few or no adults they can count on for sustained support and nurturance	Encourage **positive relationships with adults***
Disconnected from family, school and community life	Give young people **useful roles in the community and in organizations. ***
	Young people **provide services to others*.**
	Demonstrate that **children and young people are valued*.**
Does not participate in creative activities, sports, clubs or organizations in school, place of worship or community	**Support children and young people to participate** in sports, clubs or organizations*
Ridiculed, teased or hassled because they are different (poor, different race or ethnic background, interests or just don't fit in with the mainstream)	**Promote cultural competence** and understanding*
Limited ability to handle differences and conflicts in non-aggressive manner	Help children and young people develop **interpersonal skills***
	Help children and young people develop **conflict resolution skills***
Spends a lot of time alone or with unsupervised peers.	Help children and young people develop **positive peer relationships/friendships***
Doesn't care what happens and pessimistic about their future	Give children and young people a **sense of purpose and hope for the future***
	Promote and engage young people in promoting **equality and social justice***
Limited opportunities to obtain a positive sense of power and control over their lives	Help children and young people **gain a sense of personal power control over their lives*** and try new things
	Help young people develop **planning and decision making skills***
	Help young people **access employment and training services to enhance employment**
	Help young people **assert their beliefs and convictions***
Engaged in or peers engaged in risk taking behaviours (use of alcohol and drugs, drug trafficking, delinquent activities)	Help **avoid risky behaviour and adopt healthy lifestyles and sexual attitudes***
Not aware of resources and services to help them deal with difficulties and or uncertain as to how to access these services.	Provide outreach services to **help young people access services and resources**

Family Domain

Risk Factor	Protective Factor/Assets
Parents unable to communicate positively with children and young people.	Teach/support **positive family communication***
Parents unable to provide advice and counsel to children experiencing difficulties	Teach/support **family problem-solving skills**
Parental expectations of children rigid, inconsistent or non existent	Teach/support parents to **understand children's and young people's developmental needs**
Parents do not model positive or responsible behaviour	Teach/support parents to **model responsible behaviour***
Parents overwhelmed with their own issues and unable to provide support to their children	Provide **support to parent's in practical ways** (i.e. single parent groups, baby sitting networks)
Culture of "individualism" within family , everybody needs to make it on their own	Promote the importance of **family time and activities**
Parents do not know children's friends and acquaintances	Teach/support parents to **learn about and engage with children's friends**
Families outside mainstream face language and cultural barriers: unable to help their children adjust to another culture	Help parents (particularly immigrant and refugee families) learn about and adapt to **raising children within two cultures**
	Encourage/support parents facing cultural and language barriers to become **involved with their children outside of the home**
Parents unaware of signs of gang involvement and the impact on their children	Help parents identify signs of gang involvement and **support their children to resist the lure of gang**
Abusive or violent interactions among family members	Help parents **address and overcome patterns of family violence**
Family members involved or associated with gangs	Help family members **disassociate from the gang lifestyle**

Community Domain

Risk Factor	Protective Factor/Assets
High number of families supported by income assistance payments or low-paying jobs	Information about **benefits, subsidies and services is available to low income individuals and families**
	Range of **opportunities and services offered for people working and earning low-wages**
High residential mobility	Provide **safe, affordable housing to families**
Little interaction among caring neighbours	**Bring people together as a community**
Limited opportunities for positive interaction between young people and adults	Promote **interaction between adults and young people** at the community level
Young people are perceived as "problematic" and have limited opportunities to engage in useful roles in the community	**Recognize contributions of young people** in the community
	Create opportunities for young people to **engage in useful roles in their community***
Limited knowledge, interaction or comfort with people of different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds	Celebrate and **bring people together from different cultural communities**
Community does not have a common understanding of the root causes of gangs and gang violence and how the community can do to address this issue	Community has a **common understanding of the root causes of gangs** and the connections between drugs, gangs and criminal activity
	Community is working to **address root causes of gangs** and connection between gangs, drugs and criminal activity

School Domain

Risk Factor	Protective Factor/Assets
Parents not involved in helping children succeed at school particularly at junior-high and high school levels.	Supports to help **engage parents in their children's school.**
Children/young people not actively engaged in learning.	Provide supports to **help children and their parents with homework, reading abilities.**
Children /youth do not have positive, sustained relationships with teachers	Opportunities for a variety of **informal interactions between teachers and students.**
Children/youth have a low attachment to school	Promote **school spirit and sense of belonging.**
Schools do not have the resources to meet the needs of students with special learning needs.	Provide a variety of resources to **meet special learning needs.**
Limited interaction or connection between home, school and community life	Variety of ways employed to **involve parents and community in school.**
Children/youth bullied or bullying others at school.	Programs provided to **address bullying.**
Children/young people not involved in extra-curricular activities	**Extra-curricular activities** available to students.
Children/young people regularly absent or skipping school.	Programs and policies **address absenteeism**
Expulsion or suspension from school primary means for dealing with disruptive behaviour.	Policies and supports exist to **address root causes of behaviour and needs of disruptive students**
Teachers, school staff and administrators unaware or uncertain of how to respond to the challenged faced by children, youth and families from different cultures.	Programs/resources provide training and support to teachers and school staff in **cultural awareness and competence.**
Teachers and school staff lack the resources to respond to the social needs of children and their families.	Policies, supports and resources are available to help schools **respond to the social needs of children and their families.**

Services and Organizations

Risk Factor	Protective Factor/Assets
Competition among service agencies for limited resources which can promote a tendency to protect turf, client-base and mandate	**Shared knowledge and understanding of the unique services, resources and abilities of agencies** providing services to families and youth.
Services not connected to each other resulting in disconnected experiences and support for those seeking help.	**Collaborative approaches among service agencies and practitioners** to create protocols, administrative procedures and practices to cross service mandates and connect families and youth to services when they are needed.
Limited ability of services to engage in outreach and attract families, children and youth who don't access services or don't know how to access services.	**Innovative approaches to reach -out to families and children** who don't traditionally access mainstream services.
	Services **value diversity and provide a safe, nurturing and welcoming environment** for children and families.
Tendency to focus on and define problems as a result of individual's deficiency or failure and with little or no focus on external forces that pushed them to act.	**Commitment and ability to address the larger social economic issues** behind the difficulties faced by families and youth.
	Approach to services based on asset and capacity building.
Services short staffed limiting ability to provide services when they are needed and to develop sustained relationships with those seeking help.	Ability to provide **services that are friendly, informal, relationship-based and non-judgmental.**
	Practices adjusted to meet the **unique needs of individuals.**
Short-term project-based funding limiting the ability of services to build on successes and establish a long-term approach to issues.	**Flexible structures and processes that are able to tolerate failure** and "hang-in there " with families and youth dealing with complex and persistent difficulties.
	Services provide **consistent and sustained follow-up families and youth** once they leave their service.

Socio-Economic Policies

Risk Factor	Protective Factor/Assets
Lack of common understanding among service providers, funding agencies and government, of gang violence and its impact on individuals, families and communities	Community groups, non-profit societies and government have a **common understanding of the dynamics and conditions that give rise to gangs**
Lack of understanding or agreement on the best practices and approaches for addressing issues of gang violence	Community groups, non-profit societies and government **collaborate to develop relationships, approaches, practices and policies to address issues of gang activity** violence and positive youth development.
Short-term, year-to-year funding of services and organizations that limit the ability to provide sustained and innovative programs that build on experience and offer continuity of services.	**Long-term funding arrangements** with agencies to enhance service innovation, and continuity and on-going programming.
Project specific funding that does not cover administrative or operational costs of agencies and non-profit groups.	
Demands for quick, measurable outcomes that do not account for sustained long-term efforts to address complex socio-economic problems like gang violence.	Proposal and reporting requirements that recognize the complexity of issues facing people and communities and the **need for long-term commitment for substantial change**
	Policies and programs geared to the multiple barriers faced by the most troubled and endangered youth and their families .
	Streamlined reporting requirements to enable agencies to focus more on planning and delivering.
	Development and support of **policies, approaches and programs that promotes culture of mutual responsibility** to address social issues.
Lack of policies and programs that help young people in difficulty get back into school, employment or meaningful community work and civic engagement	Policies and programs geared to **prevention and asset building.**

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